Walk by the Spirit

The Message of Galatians

By

Derek Thompson

“Walk by the Spirit: The Message of Galatians”

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Preface

Many have written books about Paul's letter to the churches of Galatia. I know because I bought many of them. The letter for me raises such questions as: Why does Paul get so upset about a little thing like circumcision? What gave him the confidence that he was right and his opponents wrong? Do revivals only occur in God's timing? Does disunity in the church hinder revival? Can the church do anything to revive an unbelieving society?

In this book, I search the text of Galatians for answers. It is not a line-by-line commentary, but I include the text of Galatians for the reader's convenience. Nor is it an academic work with footnotes and references, but where I have quoted or learned from others, I give them credit in the text.

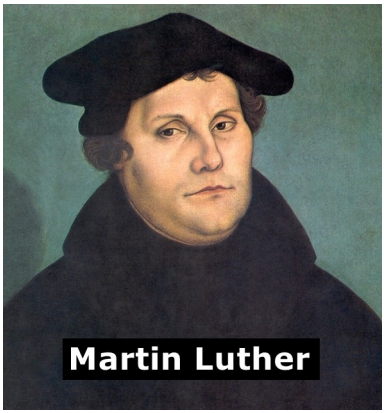
My aim in writing was not only to answer my questions but to share my enjoyment of studying Paul's letter and the things I've learned along the way. God is good and His kingdom is full of joy. Anyway, that is my excuse for my writing being sometimes a little light-hearted. I hope this book contributes to the reader's experience of abundant life. Enjoy. ☺

Derek Thompson
Albion Park
2023

1. What's all the fuss about?

Galatians 1:1-10

The Apostle Paul had a clear insight into the gospel, so clear, in fact, that he could see the danger to the Galatian churches of adding law obedience to the gospel when others could not. He even corrected Peter, one of Jesus' twelve disciples. What made him so certain? Christians through the ages have tried to emulate Paul's zeal in their own generation, sometimes with disastrous consequences.

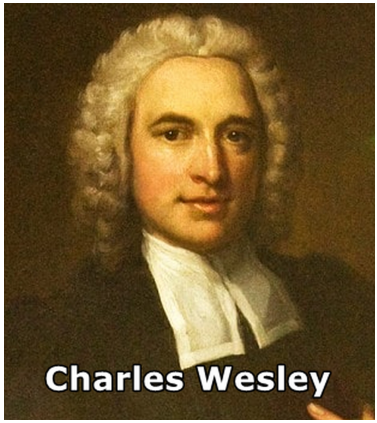


Paul wrote his letter to the churches in the Roman province of Galatia in the first century CE. The letter has been associated with a number of revivals. For example, in the 16th century, the church was in a low state. A Roman Catholic

priest named Martin Luther lived in Germany. Even though he was a priest, assurance of salvation eluded him until he found faith in Jesus through studying the Bible. He suddenly realised he didn't have to do anything to earn salvation. Soon after that discovery, Luther wrote a commentary on Galatians, which he called his favourite book of the Bible. His commentary was first published in 1519. I have a copy, not the original edition. It's still in print. Martin Luther became a leader of the church's Reformation, which brought into being the Protestant churches. The Catholic church responded by excommunicating Luther and, later, reforming its practices. And so, God revived His wayward church.

Another revival occurred a couple of hundred years later, in 1738, on Wednesday 17th May to be precise. A commercial painter named William Holland said he "providentially" came across a copy of Luther's commentary on Galatians and he took it along to a bible study group at his friend John Bray's house in Aldersgate St, London. Charles Wesley was staying at Bray's place recuperating from an illness. Charles Wesley described John Bray as "a poor, ignorant mechanic, who knows nothing but Christ—yet by knowing Him, knows and discerns all things." The following is William Holland's description in his diary of what happened that evening.

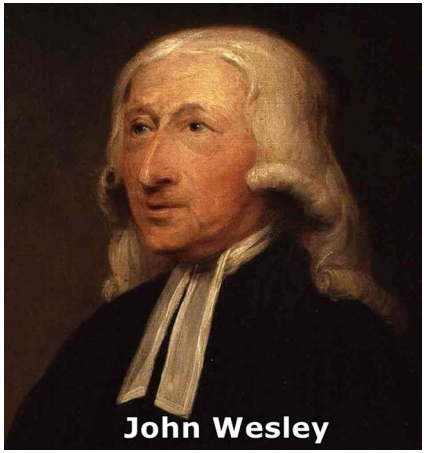
> "Mr Charles Wesley read the Preface aloud. At the words, 'What, have we nothing to do? No! nothing! but only accept of Him, "Who of God is made unto us wisdom and righteousness and sanctification and redemption"' there came such a power over me as I



cannot well describe; my great burden fell off in an instant; my heart was so filled with peace and love that I burst into tears. I almost thought I saw our Saviour! My companions, perceiving me so affected, fell on their knees and prayed. When I afterwards went into the street, I could scarcely feel the ground I trod upon."

William Holland sounds like he had a profound experience. But when I read the Preface to Martin Luther's Commentary it did nothing for me. Maybe the timing has to be right. The Holy Spirit wakes us up, opens our eyes to truths we have missed and we experience abundant life through our faith in Jesus.

For Charles Wesley, an encounter with God came the following Sunday at church. The next Wednesday, Charles's older brother, John, was present, and he found the assurance he had been seeking. Both John and Charles were Church of England ministers. They had recently returned from a failed missionary journey to America. This is what John Wesley wrote in his diary.



"In the evening I went unwillingly to a society in Aldersgate Street [he didn't even want to go!], where one was reading Luther's preface to the Epistle to the Romans [He either got the book title wrong, or they were reading from a different book this time]. About a quarter to nine, while he was describing the change which God works in the heart through faith in Christ, I felt my heart

> strangely warmed. I felt I did trust in Christ, Christ alone for salvation; and an assurance was given me that He had taken away my sins, even mine, and saved me from the law of sin and death."

The photo below is of John Wesley's study where he wrote such diary entries and many of his sermons.

John and Charles Wesley became leaders in the 18th century revival in England. John travelled widely, mainly on horseback some 250,000 miles. He preached over 40,000 sermons, established Methodist societies, and founded the Methodist denomination. Charles Wesley became the famous hymn writer, writing over 6,000 hymns, including "And Can It Be", "Christ the Lord Is Risen Today", and the carol "Hark! The Herald Angels Sing". There is now a plaque on the site of John Bray's house.

William Holland and John Bray don't get mentioned on the plaque, but they too played an important role in the revival. John Bray's house became the centre of Moravian and Methodist activities in London. William Holland became a Moravian for a while and later returned to the Anglican church. But why did the letter to the Galatians cause such a fuss?

Background

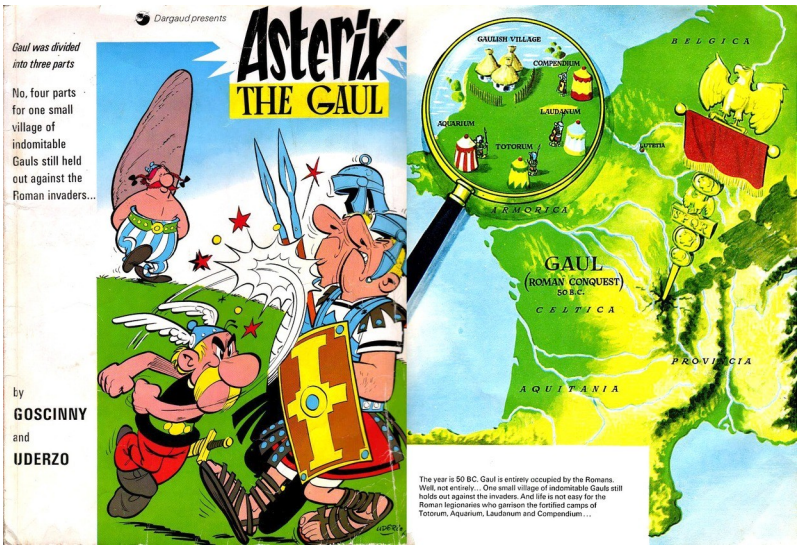
Reading Galatians is like listening to one side of a telephone conversation. I overheard a young woman speaking on her mobile phone while shopping a while ago and I was tempted to ask her why she was so angry at her boyfriend. I couldn't understand from only her side of the phone call.

Everything we know about the problem in the Galatian churches, we learn from this letter. The only reason we attribute the letter to Paul is because he gives his name. We can't be certain when he wrote it. I take the view Paul wrote it before the first church council, which was held in 49 or 50 CE in Jerusalem, because that council settled the issues Paul tackles in his letter. If that is correct, then Paul wrote the letter in about 48 CE, which would make it the first-written book of the New Testament, even before the gospels.

The controversy that gave rise to this letter was whether Gentile Christians had to obey the Old Testament laws as did the Jewish Christians (the Jews called non-Jews, Gentiles). Gentile Christian numbers in the church by this time rivaled the number of Jewish Christians. Some of the Jewish Christians were asking: Do Gentiles have to become Jews to be Christians? Do males need to be circumcised? Is Christianity a sect of Judaism?

Acts Chapter 15 says the Jerusalem Church Council resolved all those questions in the negative. And that should have ended the matter. But the early church recognised God's inspiration of Paul's letter, and its timeless message to all Christians. Paul was not just writing on Jewish laws, he wanted to strengthen the Galatian's faith in Christ. He wrote of the good news of the arrival of God's Kingdom and the New Covenant, salvation through faith in Christ, and living with the indwelling Holy Spirit. These matters have ongoing relevance.

What do we know about these people called Galatians? From my Asterix the Gaul comics and watching the Horrible Histories TV program, I learned the Gauls were Celts occupying a wide area of Europe from France to Turkey (now called the Republic of Türkiye). They lived in tribal groups that only ever united in order to fight outsiders. They were enemies of Rome until Julius Caesar conquered them.



The Romans created the Province of Galatia in the area of modern day Türkiye, naming it after the Gauls living in the north. Paul’s first missionary journey was to southern Galatia.

In Acts Chapters 13 and 14, Luke described Paul's first missionary journey where he visited the towns of the region: Antioch (there were two cities called Antioch, this one was in the neighbouring Province of Pisidia), and Iconium, Lystra and Derbe (all three in Galatia). It is likely Paul wrote his letter from his home church in the other Antioch, in Syria. Paul was responding to the report he received of false teaching perverting the gospel he preached in Galatia. Hence, God can use the letter to the Galatians to call people back to the truth of the gospel whenever the church goes astray.

Paul's How-Do-You-Do

Now we turn to the text of the letter. Galatians opens with a standard salutation, at least for first century letter writing, and then Paul presents his gospel (vs 1-5).

Galatians 1:1-5

> [1] Paul an apostle — sent neither by human commission
> nor from human authorities, but through Jesus Christ and
> God the Father, who raised him from the dead — [2] and
> all the members of God's family who are with me,
>
> To the churches of Galatia:
>
> [3] Grace to you and peace from God our Father and the
> Lord Jesus Christ, [4] who gave himself for our sins to set
> us free from the present evil age, according to the will of
> our God and Father, [5] to whom be the glory forever and
> ever. Amen.

I like the way ancient letters state who wrote the letter at the beginning. Today, we go to the end of a letter to find out who wrote it. We call Paul, the Apostle Paul, but Paul never referred to himself by this title, he called himself "Paul an apostle" (Rom 1:1, 1 Cor 1:1; 2 Cor 1:1; 2 Tim 1:1; Titus 1:1). An apostle is a person who is sent. It is what he does. It was the same with Peter, another apostle who didn't take the title. "Apostle" was not an honorary title, that could lead to pride, but a privileged calling to a life of service.

In the collectivist culture of the Mediterranean, it was not unusual for a letter to come from a group of people. This letter is from Paul, together with the members of his church. Note that members of the church in Antioch, the churches of Galatia, and the churches where you live, are all members of God's family. This is the basis of church unity.

Paul's reason for writing was to defend the gospel against corruption. The word gospel means good news and it is primarily good news for God, the Father of His family. His gracious nature desires peace for His children (vs. 3). It is good news for humanity, too, but we aren't as important as our

Creator. God is gracious in His mercy towards us who sin against both God and other people. His grace is the reason the Son of God entered human history. In so doing, Christ's death became inevitable. Satan tempted Jesus to avoid the cross but failed. See my book, "Achieving Atonement", for the role of the cross in our salvation.

Notice in verse 3, Paul called Jesus, "the Lord Jesus Christ". Paul often used this phrase. It isn't Jesus' full name, although Paul used it as if it were. Let's take "Lord," first. The Bible that Paul and Jesus used was our Old Testament. They used a Greek translation named the Septuagint (so called because a team of 70 translators produced it). When the Hebrew Scriptures used the Lord's name, they only gave the consonants (e.g. when God introduced Himself to Moses in Exodus 3:13-15) because they thought it too holy to write God's name in its entirety. "*Yahweh*" is a guess. Our modern English Bibles translate the name of God as LORD in upper case letters. Paul only used the Lord's name when he is quoting the Old Testament. In the Greek Septuagint, they translated it as "Lord". So, when Paul, who used the Septuagint, called Jesus "Lord," he honoured Jesus' divinity. Jesus accepted His disciples calling Him Lord, feeling no need to qualify the title (Matthew 7:21-23 and Luke 17:37). Don't let the JWs tell you that Jesus is not God.

Jesus' name, given to Him by an angel because He would "save his people from their sins" (Matt 2:21), means Saviour. It is the same name as Joshua, which is the English translation of the Hebrew name *Yeshua*. Jesus is the English translation of the Greek equivalent *Iesous*. There is no letter J in Hebrew or Greek.

The term "Christ" in the phrase "the Lord Jesus Christ" means "anointed". Anointing originally meant to rub or pour oil on a wound for healing. Consequently, the Holy Spirit's power to heal is called anointing, and the word depicts God's

Spirit empowering a person for a particular mission, such as being a prophet, a priest, or a king. And Christ was all three: prophet, priest and king. He was Spirit-filled and empowered to heal, cast out demons and work miracles.

Verse 4 states the good news of God's rescue mission to set the captives free (Luke 4:16-21) and bring people back into God's Kingdom. Jesus is the God who saves (Ps 88). If we could extract ourselves from our predicament, or help in our rescue, we wouldn't need a Saviour, just a helper, someone to give us that extra shove out of the pit. But we are dead in our sins, in an impossible situation. We need a Saviour, someone who can rescue the helpless and revive the dead.

What is "the present evil age" mentioned in verse 4? It is like Jesus mentioning in passing that people are evil (Matt 7:11). It is where we live. Evil is everywhere, not just in us as individuals, but in our culture, our social systems, the environment, and the demonic realm. This is not the way Hollywood movies or TV dramas portray humanity. For the sake of story simplicity, they divide people into goodies and baddies and the watching public assume they are among the goodies. But each and every one of us is evil. I am sinful like the next person. To sin means to fall short of the mark, which is to be holy as God is holy. How far we fall short doesn't make any difference to our status as sinners. We like to think we are not as bad as others and if God judges on the curve, we will be okay. We are all evil and none deserve eternal life.

Jesus won the victory over all these things and God exalted Him above all others (Phil 2:9). Jesus reigns as king and 1 Cor 15:25 says "he must reign until he has put all his enemies under his feet". This reminds us, if we needed reminding, that the spiritual war still rages.

Paul said the spiritual war is "against the rulers, against the authorities, against the powers of this dark world and against

spiritual forces of evil in the heavenly realms" (Eph 6:12). These dark powers want people to fight against each other. Jesus wants us to love one another.

God permits the evil age to continue for a time while He rescues people into His kingdom. Then Jesus will return. Jesus is Lord, not Satan, even though it may not always appear that way. The reason we doubt the goodness of God and His power and authority is because of our sin and self-centredness.

Christians can praise God in every circumstance they face because Jesus won the victory over the evil powers that tried to overcome Him. We can stand against evil knowing that evil spirits must submit to our Lord Jesus Christ, who possesses ultimate authority in heaven and earth.

Now to the body of the letter.

There is no other Gospel.

Galatians, does not follow the typical letter writing format of the age, which, after the greeting, would give thanks to God (or pagan gods) for the recipients' faith. Here, Paul comes straight to the point.

Galatians 1:6-8

> [6] I am astonished that you are so quickly deserting the one who called you in the grace of Christ and are turning to a different gospel — [there's a different gospel!?] [7] not that there is another gospel, but there are some who are confusing you and want to pervert the gospel of Christ. [8] But even if we or an angel from heaven should proclaim to you a gospel contrary to what we proclaimed to you, let that one be accursed!

It intrigues me how Paul could see so clearly that the Galatians were departing from the gospel. We live in an age of pluralism. It is so much easier to get on with others in a

pluralistic society, if we say everyone can believe whatever they like. We set aside truth for the sake of political correctness. Someone like Paul is called dogmatic. How did Paul discern the Spirit's voice from the devil's voice? The devil proposed another gospel, one that said you can do your own good works and God will appreciate your sincere efforts. Paul saw this as sincerely wrong. Sincerity is a display of emotion. It is not a proof of truth.

In verse 8, Paul cursed the false teachers for perverting the gospel. This sounds very harsh coming from a Christian who preached a gospel of God's love and mercy. Paul reprimanded the Galatians, and he cursed the false teachers. But I have learned something from Facebook. I have hundreds of Facebook "friends", most of whom I have never met. When debating an actual friend on Facebook, other "friends" reading our conversation might think we dislike each other. Sometimes we use the small smiley face emojis, to show we are speaking as friends. Now, Paul personally knew the people he was writing to, and they knew him. There were no emojis, but he called them brothers and sisters (Gal 1:11; 3:15; 5:13; 6:18), my little children (Gal 4:19), and friends (Gal 4:28; 5:11; 6:1). Paul wanted his Galatian friends to reject the false teaching. As for the false teachers, if they repented, Paul would retract his curse on them and treat them as friends.

In middle eastern culture, shame could, and still can, be used in a positive way to restore people to their social group. Ancient near eastern languages had many words to cover the many nuanced uses of shame, which we do not appreciate in the west, because we translate all of them by the one word: shame. Where we interpret Paul's use of such rhetorical devices as negative criticism, the recipients of the letter saw it as showing Paul's concern for their place in God's family.

There is another aspect to verse 8. God the Father does not want His children to be led astray. It is the flip side of love. His anger burns against anyone who tries to harm them. Paul is imitating the righteous anger of the Lord in raging against the false teachers in Galatia. Jesus said if anyone causes a child to sin, it would be better for him to have a large millstone tied around his neck and be thrown into the sea (Mark 9:42). On another occasion, in the temple courtyard, Jesus overturned the moneychangers' tables and drove out the traders. The courtyard was the sole place in the temple that Gentiles could worship God, and it incensed Jesus that the religious authorities allowed it to happen.

Teachers who align with the doctrines of demons will share the same fate as them—they will perish. Our enemies are not flesh and blood (Eph 6:12) and, unlike demons, God can reconcile with humans through Christ. God will even save false teachers. They only needed to repent and believe. God knew they thought they were right in teaching Gentiles to obey God's laws. Hence, Paul sought to shame them to change.

Galatians 1:9-10

> 9 As we have said before, so now I repeat, if anyone proclaims to you a gospel contrary to what you received, let that one be accursed! [They didn't have bold print in those days, so they just repeated it to emphasise the point.]
>
> 10 Am I now seeking human approval, or God's approval? Or am I trying to please people? If I were still pleasing people, I would not be a servant of Christ.

Our devotion to Christ often brings with it the disapproval of those who don't share our faith. Hence Paul said, "If I were still pleasing people, I would not be a servant of Christ."

Unbelievers may feel we are judging them for their sins, but everyone is a sinner, Christians included. The difference is God's people are members of His family. Family members have their disagreements and quarrels, but they are still family. Let it be clear that God doesn't abandon anyone because of their sins.

The News from Galatia

It distressed Paul to discover that the Galatians had fallen prey to false teaching, and so soon after receiving the gospel. Paul's dismay increased when he heard the false teachers had attacked him on three separate fronts, as we deduce from his reply:

> 1) They questioned Paul's apostleship.
>
> 2) They questioned Paul's teaching that salvation was through faith alone. They said Christians must add to their faith, obedience to God's laws.
>
> 3) They dismissed the new life of freedom. The false teachers said that if we were free from obeying God's written commandments, we could do whatever we please.

Paul replied to each of these attacks as we will see as we continue through his letter. First, let's wrap up this section.

Reviewing Galatians 1:1-10

When God reveals Himself to us, His grace transforms us. What a privilege! You feel like your feet don't touch the ground (as William Holland said), your heart is "strangely warmed" (as John Wesley said), you are a new creation (as Paul said in Gal 6:15). These things happen when we first become Christians and are "born again".

But being human, means we cannot sustain those first exalted feelings. We need our relationship with God to grow. God gives His children the Holy Spirit and that too is exciting. We can observe the Spirit at work in our brothers and sisters in the church. God makes everyone in His own image so He could be friends with us. Jesus saw everyone as family and wants us to love one another.

Paul could spot a faulty gospel from distant Antioch. We need to proclaim an unambiguous gospel for our evangelism to be effective. I want to understand the gospel as clearly as Paul. Our quest begins.

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2. Paul's Credentials

Galatians 1:11-24

The stamp on the airmail depicts Emperor Claudius, who reigned 41 to 54 CE, which included the time Paul was writing. He probably, posted the letter in Antioch where he lived in 48 CE. Paul would have sent it by air mail, but because of the lack of planes, he had it delivered by hand. But I turn aside to tell you how I come to write this book.

Back in 1985, I worked in George St, Sydney and every Friday lunchtime I went to a City Bible Talk. John Chapman, the Anglican evangelist, ran the studies. One Friday, John wasn't there, and he had asked a minister from an inner-city church to give the talk. I don't remember his name, but he started by saying how he felt privileged to be paid to study and teach the scriptures. But then he added, you who work full-time can study a section of Scripture, one book of the Bible, the parables of Jesus, or a single Psalm. Choose whatever interests

you. He thought we might become our church's expert in that part of Scripture. If we ever had to take a Bible study or give a talk, we could use our special passage of interest.

Well, it sounded good to me. I had been a Christian for a few years and wanted to learn something from my bible. But what should I choose? I preferred a short book. The church in the 1980s was abuzz with talk of revival. Billy Graham visited Sydney in 1979 and, on the last day of the four-week crusade, he stood before a crowd of 100,000 people at Randwick Racecourse and said it felt like revival was coming. The crowd cheered, but it didn't come to pass. The church was ready and waiting. I associated Galatians with revival, as I told you earlier; and Galatians is only six chapters long. Guess what I chose? ☺

Now, some 40 years later, I'm very late middle aged, I own over a dozen commentaries on Galatians, I've led a Bible study group through Galatians, I've preached through Galatians twice in church and memorised and partly forgotten the entire text many times. This book is based on those sermons (hence the repetition along the way). That Anglican minister was right. It has come in handy. So, I challenge you, my reader, to choose a passage of Scripture and become your church's expert in it. I know it's normal to leave the challenge until the end of the book, but I got in early. At least you can relax for the rest of the book, without fear of anymore challenges.

The false teachers

In the previous chapter, we noted that the troublemakers in the Galatian churches attacked Paul's message on three grounds, which I will reiterate.

> 1) They attacked Paul personally, questioning his authority as an apostle.

2) They said salvation is not through faith alone. The faithful must obey God's laws given in Scripture to be approved by God.

3) They were skeptical of the new life free from the law. The false teachers contended if Christians are free from living by God's rules, they could do and say whatever they pleased.

In Galatians 1:11-24, we will look at how Paul defends his credentials as an apostle. The Jewish leadership hadn't laid hands on him, although they wanted to arrest him. The visitors from Jerusalem thought the church in Jerusalem needed to ordain apostles or qualified pastors. Today, people say a church must have a denominational covering and ministers must do formal training ("we can't trust amateurs"). The discipline of logical reasoning calls this a personal attack fallacy. Politicians often use it to divert attention from the paucity of their own arguments. Let's see how Paul, in his letter, handled this attack as we turn to verses 11 and 12.

Paul's Vindication of His Apostleship

Galatians 1:11-12

> [11] For I want you to know, brothers and sisters, that the gospel that was proclaimed by me is not of human origin; [12] for I did not receive it from a human source, nor was I taught it, but I received it through a revelation of Jesus Christ.

Paul was educated in Jerusalem. We learn from Acts 22:3 that he trained at the famous school of Gamaliel, but he didn't think it important enough to mention here. I, myself, have listened to thousands of Christian talks and read thousands of Christian books and did a university theology degree, but, although such things are useful, they are nonessential. We

receive the gospel through a revelation of Jesus Christ. This is the one important thing.

The church didn't have ordination for its first three centuries. Ordination has become a ceremony, which confers upon the candidate authority to minister in the denomination. The number of denominations has grown to over 30,000 since the protestant reformation. Ordination doesn't count for anything outside the denomination that confers it. We can view denominations as para-church organisations serving their member churches. Membership of a denomination doesn't affect the legitimacy of the church. The validity of a church rests in being a part of God's family, as Paul called the church.

In the next section, Paul replied to the personal attacks by his opponents. This is what he wrote.

Galatians 1:13-14

> [13] You have heard, no doubt, of my earlier life in Judaism. I was violently persecuting the church of God and was trying to destroy it. [14] I advanced in Judaism beyond many among my people of the same age, for I was far more zealous for the traditions of my ancestors.

The troublemakers' argument went like this: "You can't believe Paul because he used to be an enemy of God's church. Look at his life of sin! Should such a person lead the church? He is too flaky. He starts a church and then moves on to another city."

Paul didn't deny his past sins. He isn't afraid to testify that God saved him from that life. But… vs 15.

Galatians 1:15-17

> [15] But when God, who had set me apart before I was born and called me through his grace, was pleased [16] to reveal his Son to me, so that I might proclaim him among the

Gentiles, I did not confer with any human being, [17] nor did I go up to Jerusalem to those who were already apostles before me, but I went away at once into Arabia, and afterwards I returned to Damascus.

God creates people who He intends to live in love for one another. One way we serve others is to point them to God. Paul understood his conversion and call as an apostle in this light. As a Jew, Paul was one of God's chosen people. The Jews were the elect of God. But after God revealed His Son to him, Paul ceased persecuting the church and replaced his zeal for the traditions of the Jews with zeal for God and His family. To be set apart, or chosen, or elect, means to be incorporated into Jesus' mission of taking the gospel to the world. Possibly, Paul worked through these things and revised his understanding of scripture, during his time in Arabia.

A map will help us follow Paul's travels.

Acts Chapter 9 fills in the details. Paul was travelling from Jerusalem to Damascus to arrest Christians when Jesus appeared to him on the road. The light of Christ blinded him and he had to be led into Damascus. The Lord instructed a Christian named Ananias, who lived in Damascus, to go to Paul and pray for him to be healed. Ananias wasn't keen, knowing Paul's reputation, but he obeyed anyway. He even baptised Paul, who started proclaiming Jesus in Damascus.

Paul's preaching caused such an uproar in Damascus that the Jews planned to kill him. The church helped Paul escape by lowering him in a basket through a hole in the city wall. Paul sought safety in Arabia for a year or so and then returned to Damascus.

Now let us continue to read.

Galatians 1:18-20

> [18] Then after three years I did go up to Jerusalem to visit Cephas and stayed with him fifteen days; [19] but I did not see any other apostle except James the Lord's brother. [20] In what I am writing to you, before God, I do not lie!

Did Paul mean three years after returning to Damascus, or three years after Jesus appeared to him (which would include his time in Arabia)? We can't be certain, but since Paul continued this dating system in Chapter 2 and because he saw his conversion as the most important event of his life, he may well have dated everything from then.

Cephas is the Aramaic name Jesus gave Simon when he called him as a disciple (John 1:42). Aramaic would have been their first language. It means "rock" or "stone". The Greek word for "rock" was *petra*, which gives us the name Peter. So, Simon, son of John, was known as both Cephas and Peter, depending on what language you spoke. Paul also had two

names, Paul being his Greek name and Saul, his Hebrew name. God did not change his name, as some mistakenly say.

Paul differentiated James, the Lord's brother, from James, the brother of John and disciple of Jesus, who Herod Agrippa had killed (Acts 12:2). Where did Paul go next?

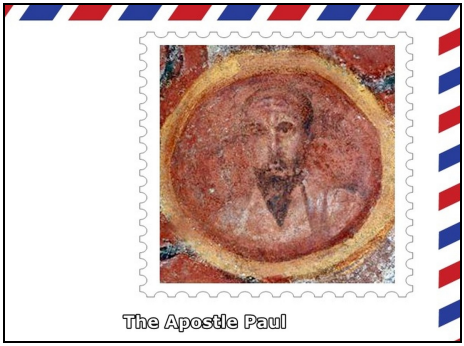
Galatians 1:21-24

> [21] Then I went into the regions of Syria and Cilicia,
> [22] and I was still unknown by sight to the churches of
> Judea that are in Christ; [23] they only heard it said, "The
> one who formerly was persecuting us is now proclaiming
> the faith he once tried to destroy." [24] And they glorified
> God because of me.

We learn from Acts 9:30 that it was dangerous for Paul in Jerusalem, and when the believers in Jerusalem discovered a death plot, they extricated Paul to Caesarea, from where he sailed to Tarsus, which was his hometown. On the above map, we see Paul's journey from Damascus to Jerusalem and then to the regions of Syria and Cilicia.

Persecution of Christians in Judea at that time caused many to flee the country. Some found refuge in Antioch. Their witness led many in Antioch to the Lord. Barnabas was there, and he went to Tarsus to find Paul and bring him back to help with teaching the growing church (Acts 11:25). A Christian named Agabus, who had a prophetic gift, came from Jerusalem to Antioch and prophesied the famine that became the reason for Paul's collections for the poor in Judea. Paul never got to preach the gospel throughout Judea, but the churches there heard about him and praised God for His grace towards Paul and them. Their attitude contrasted with that of the false believers.

Paul's authority



Here is the earliest known picture of the Apostle Paul. It was found in the catacombs of Rome, close to Paul's grave. The artist must have used his imagination because it dates from some 300 years after Paul's time. But Paul deserves to go on a stamp. Rome thought little of him. They killed him, but in God's kingdom, everyone loves him.

The first three gospels record that the chief priests, the scribes, and the elders demanded of Jesus "By what authority are you doing these things?" (Matt 21:23; Mark 11:28; Luke 20:2). Jesus replied, where did John's baptism come from, heaven or from human origin? They refused to answer for fear of the crowds had they said it was of human origin. So, Jesus refused to give them an answer. The religious leaders felt belittled because they hadn't authorised John's baptism or Jesus' ministry. Although the world's leaders did not value Jesus, God not only raised Him from the dead, He also highly exalted Him in His kingdom where every knee will bend and every tongue confess that Jesus is Lord (Phil 2:9-11). Jesus and Paul weren't concerned about their reputation before a sinful world. In God's kingdom, our joy is in serving others.

Paul declared in Galatians 1:1 that he was an apostle, one set apart by Jesus Christ, Himself, as a messenger of the gospel. In verses 11-24, Paul made three points regarding his credentials.

> 1) Paul's gospel was not something he made up or learnt from someone else, he received it by revelation (vs 11-12). He was open about his earlier way of life—how he

persecuted the church. Jesus Christ appeared to Paul and set him free from trying to earn God's approval, for that is what a religious zealot is trying to do (vs 13-14). Paul became an eyewitness to Jesus' resurrection and his life was a testimony to Jesus' mercy and grace.

2) Second, he was called to preach the gospel among the Gentiles, the non-Jews (vs 16). Paul carried out this task under the anointing of God. He came to see his own teaching and writing as the Word of God (1 Thes 2:13). Paul preached with demonstrations of the Spirit's power (1 Cor 2:4) and he planted many churches, which he referred to as the seal of his apostleship (1 Cor 9:2).

3) Third, Paul's message was one with the other apostles. He learned more from them about Jesus' teaching, but he says in Gal 2:6, "these men added nothing to my message." Paul didn't get his gospel message from the other apostles, but his gospel was the same as theirs.

We are also commissioned by Jesus, even though we are not apostles. In Matthew 28:19-20, Jesus instructed His disciples to make disciples of all nations. After the first generation of disciples died, the task fell to those they discipled, and so on. Jesus' command now applies to the church of our generation—to proclaim the gospel, teach the Word of God, heal the sick, cast out demons, to make disciples and baptise them in the name of all three members of the Trinity. Churches work together to fulfil the Great Commission. We are not competing against one another.

The Story So Far

The first Chapter of Galatians taught us three things.

1) Freedom from working to please God is of the essence of the gospel. The enemy seeks to deceive the church to dull its

proclamation of the gospel. In response, the Holy Spirit moves to revive His people. Jesus came to set the captives free, so the church needs to proclaim the gospel of freedom.

2) God, in His grace, entrusts the gospel to His disciples. The apostles preached it and recorded it in writing for us. Let's give the Bible the respect it deserves. Scripture isn't only human ideas, or a source of doctrine, or rules for living. The Bible conveys God's Word, which creates life eternal.

3) Satan, our arch-enemy, wants to enslave humanity under his power and destine us for destruction. And, if the devil cannot deceive us and prevent our salvation, he tries to neutralise our witness for Christ. He comes as a thief to steal away our freedom using deception. He tempts us to work harder to please God and discourages us as failures because of our sin. But Christ has overcome evil. Our righteousness is in Him. God rewarded Christ with authority in His kingdom, and Jesus commanded and equipped His disciples to take the gospel to the nations.

Our part in the spiritual warfare is to pray for the empowering presence of God to free us from every foothold the enemy has in our lives. The Lord's Prayer teaches us to pray for deliverance from evil. So, we should follow the Holy Spirit's lead in routing out the enemy in our midst, just as the Israelites did in taking possession of the Promised Land.

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3. The trip to HQ

Galatians 2:1-10

In Galatians Chapter 1, Paul introduced the letter and defended his ministry against his critics. The letter applies to any community in need of revival. Now we turn to the first ten verses of Galatians Chapter 2, where our three amigos, Paul, Barnabas and Titus, gallop up to HQ (the Jerusalem Church).

Galatians 2:1

> [1] Then after fourteen years I went up again to Jerusalem with Barnabas, taking Titus along with me.

"Then after fourteen years". Fourteen years after what? Either 14 years after he met Jesus on the road to Damascus, or 14 years after his previous trip to Jerusalem. Or was it 12 or 13 years by our reckoning? In those days, they reckoned years as inclusive of parts of years. So, when Christ died, He may not have been in the grave for three 24-hour days. For Jews, the day ended at sunset. And two hours before sunset on Friday, 24 hours on Saturday, and a few hours Sunday morning counted

as three days. In the same way, we can't be sure of Paul's exact chronology.

If you are interested in timelines, we only know a few dates that anchor New Testament events at particular dates in history. One is the death of King Herod in 4 BCE, which makes Jesus' birth 5 or 6 BCE. Luke said Jesus began His public ministry at about age 30 and, taking into consideration the events recorded in all the gospels, Jesus' ministry lasted from one to 3 years. So, the Romans crucified Jesus in around 30 CE. One or two years afterward, the Jews martyred Stephen. We first meet Paul at the martyrdom of Stephen in 32 CE (plus or minus a year). Paul minded the coats of those doing the stoning. The Council of Jerusalem was in 49 CE. Now if Paul wrote Galatians before the Council in around 48 CE, and Paul's conversion was 13 or 14 years earlier, Paul's conversion was in 34 or 35 CE.

The reason Paul mentioned in his letter that Barnabas went with him to Jerusalem was because Barnabas had accompanied Paul on his first missionary journey to Galatia, so the Galatians knew him. And Titus was one of Paul's Gentile converts. He called Titus his "child in the faith" in his letter to Titus (Titus 1:4). In a collectivist culture, that meant not only that he led Titus to faith in Christ, but they had a relationship where Paul cared for Titus, who responded with loyalty.

Galatians 2:2

> [2] I went up in response to a revelation. Then I laid before them (though only in a private meeting with the acknowledged leaders) the gospel that I proclaim among the Gentiles, in order to make sure that I was not running, or had not run, in vain.

Paul didn't say what form the revelation took that sent him to Jerusalem. Did Agabus deliver a prophecy (Luke mentioned Agabus's prophecy about the drought in the reign of Claudius,

41-54 CE, in Acts 11:28)? God might have spoken directly to Paul or through a dream. Of course, God knew Paul preached the same gospel as those in Jerusalem. Maybe God didn't tell Paul why he should go to Jerusalem. Paul wondered if his preaching was in vain, despite his confidence in the gospel's truth. He saw the resurrected Jesus, and Paul hadn't departed from it. There were two ways to get to Jerusalem. The route from Antioch to Jerusalem via sea to Tyre or Caesarea was much quicker than going overland. They took with them a collection for the poor (Acts 11:29). But, why did God send Paul to Jerusalem?

God was, and still is, concerned for church unity. Today, sections of the church are willing to split over homosexuality. In the first century, the circumcision faction was determined to win the church to accept their teaching. God might have acted to avoid a split in the early church. The circumcision faction comprised those Jews who said Gentiles must obey the laws of Moses. While other Jews, such as Paul, believed we are justified before God by faith in Christ alone.

What happened in Jerusalem? Next verse:

Galatians 2:3

> [3] But even Titus, who was with me, was not compelled to be circumcised, though he was a Greek.

The fact that the Jerusalem apostles did not require Titus, a Gentile believer, to be circumcised was confirmation of Paul's understanding of the gospel. But there were some false believers in the Jerusalem church.

Galatians 2:4-5

> [4] But because of false believers secretly brought in, who slipped in to spy on the freedom we have in Christ Jesus, so that they might enslave us — [5] we did not submit to them even for a moment, so that the truth of the gospel might always remain with you.

Some Jews thought that both Jewish and Gentile Christians should obey the Old Testament rules. Isn't the Bible God's instruction manual? Jesus said He did not come to abolish the law but fulfil it (Matt 5:17). So, there were differing opinions. But the leaders of the church did not support the circumcision faction.

Galatians 2:6

> [6] And from those who were supposed to be acknowledged leaders (what they actually were makes no difference to me; God shows no partiality) — those leaders contributed nothing to me.

Had the acknowledged leaders agreed with the legalists, Paul would have stood his ground. The Jerusalem apostles did not intimidate Paul. God shows no partiality. Jesus spoke to Paul, too.

Galatians 2:7-8

> [7] On the contrary, when they saw that I had been entrusted with the gospel for the uncircumcised, just as Peter had been entrusted with the gospel for the circumcised [8] (for he who worked through Peter making him an apostle to the circumcised also worked through me in sending me to the Gentiles),

It turned out that the leaders agreed with Paul about the gospel. The sole distinction was the Jerusalem apostles focused on reaching the Jews, and God sent Paul to the Gentiles. God assigned them to different mission fields.

Galatians 2:9

> [9] and when James and Cephas and John, who were acknowledged pillars, recognised the grace that had been given to me, they gave to Barnabas and me the right hand of fellowship, agreeing that we should go to the Gentiles and they to the circumcised.

Now we find out the identity of some of the acknowledged leaders: James, the younger brother of Jesus, Cephas, also called Peter, and John, who wrote the gospel bearing his name. Paul didn't call James, Cephas and John just acknowledged leaders, but acknowledged pillars of the church because of their foundational role. They recognised the grace of God on Paul's ministry. It was the same grace that they had experienced in theirs. When they gave the right hand of fellowship to Barnabas and Paul, it was not just a friendly gesture, but an agreement that recognised each other's missions. The grace of God promotes unity in the church.

Church unity involves us in doing things together with other churches. The handshake meant that James, Cephas, John, Barnabas and Paul agreed they were undertaking the Lord's

work in different fields. The different denominations today should take note.

Paul didn't write about church structure or organisation. No matter how the church at Jerusalem organised itself, the important thing is what they organised to do: proclaim the gospel and make disciples.

However, the Jerusalem church leaders did ask Paul to do one thing.

Galatians 2:10

> [10] They asked only one thing, that we remember the poor, which was actually what I was eager to do.

We learn from Acts 11 that Paul and Barnabas brought from the church in Antioch, a donation for famine relief in Judea, which had been enduring a drought. The Jews were persecuting Christians and withheld any aid from them. The Jerusalem apostles supported Paul's mission to the Gentiles, but asked him not to forget the poor in the churches of Judea.

Church unity

Let's consider for a moment the subject of church unity. If Paul was not told by God to go to Jerusalem to check his gospel, what was God doing? God already knew Paul proclaimed the same gospel as the apostles in Jerusalem. But Paul had run his own race apart from the other apostles for 14 years. This division of ministry provided a crack for false believers to infiltrate the church. It was important enough for God to respond. God sees church unity as very important.

Jesus, on the night of His betrayal, prayed to His Father to help His followers remain in unity. Jesus prayed for His disciples in John 17:11 "that they may be one as we are one". Then in John 17:20-21, Jesus prayed.

John 17:20-21

> [20] "I ask not only on behalf of these [his disciples], but also on behalf of those who will believe in me through their word [that includes us], [21] that they may all be one. As you, Father, are in me and I am in you, may they also be in us," [Why?] "so that the world may believe that you have sent me."

The lack of unity in the church today is a sign of the need for revival. How can unchurched people believe God sent His Son to save His people if the church is not representative of a household you would want to join? It looks like just another dysfunctional family. Jesus prayer continued in verse 22.

John 17:22

> [22] "The glory that you have given me I have given them, [Why?] so that they may be one, as we are one,"

The church is glorious when in unity, but not otherwise. We must give a high priority to unity in the church. There is one more thing in Jesus' prayer.

John 17:23

> [23] Jesus prayed, "I in them and you in me, that they may become completely one, [Why?] so that the world may know that you have sent me and have loved them even as you have loved me."

Those church members who don't value how much God loves His people treat church unity as an optional extra, nice to have but not as important as their denomination's doctrines. Nor is church unity a means to an end, a church growth strategy or part of an advertising campaign. The Father wants His children to stop fighting and using each other and to love one another. Jesus understood how important the church is to

the Father, because He gave His life to save God's children. What parents likes to see their children fighting?

The good news is that we can enjoy communion with God. God's people unite with one another through communion with God. The opposite of community is disunity. Church disunity is not a cause of the dryness in the church, it is the symptom that tells us something is wrong. It should ring alarm bells. The churches' preaching of the gospel is hindered by the disunity that is seen by those we are trying to reach.

After Paul had been a Christian for 14 years, God sent him to Jerusalem to visit the apostles. A further 14 years later, Paul was well qualified to write on church unity in his letter to the Ephesians.

Ephesians 4:3-6

> 3 making every effort to maintain the unity of the Spirit in the bond of peace. [Why?] 4 There is one body and one Spirit, just as you were called to the one hope of your calling, 5 one Lord, one faith, one baptism, 6 one God and Father of all, who is above all and through all and in all.

Paul grew in his understanding of the importance of church unity. Preachers often point out the slow progress in the faith of Peter, but Paul grew in the faith, too. Paul came to value all Christians worshipping the one God. There is one church beloved by God. He sends His Spirit to the church and He shares communion with us. How can Christians so readily divide the body of Christ? How dare we neglect the unity of Christ's body!

Evangelistic meetings and good works of community service fail to sound a clear message from a divided church. The same faith that brings us into unity with Jesus brings us into communion with His people. The church is a community of believers. We cannot allow differences in church worship

styles, church organisational structures, doctrinal statements, service arrangements, historical formation, and so on to tear apart the body of Christ. We should pursue truth together.

Change starts with ourselves. The church is where we belong because we belong with God. Our Father looks for faith in our hearts, the sign that we are His children. God wants everyone to join Him in His kingdom. There we have the privilege of joining with Him inviting people into His family and enjoying fellowship in His church.

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4. The Showdown

Galatians 2:11-21

Before we move to the second half of Chapter 2 of Paul's letter to the Galatians, I will remind you of the last episode. We saw our intrepid trio, the three amigos, Paul, Barnabas and Titus, travelled to Jerusalem because God had given them a revelation: "Get up there straight away."

Paul assumed God sent him to Jerusalem to get the stamp of approval for the gospel that he had proclaimed to the Gentiles for fourteen years. But both God and Paul knew his gospel was okay. Was there another reason? God wants unity in His church. When God's people are united it is much easier to tackle our differences.

In Chapter 2:11-21, just when we thought everything was going fine in the early church, a problem arises. Have you ever settled one problem only to have another pop up? Conflict arose between Paul and Peter. The apostles' clash is one of the

most dramatic incidents of the young church. The two apostles went head to head.

Galatians 2:11-12 Paul Rebukes Peter at Antioch

> [11] But when Cephas came to Antioch, I opposed him to his face, because he stood self-condemned; [12] for until certain people came from James, he used to eat with the Gentiles. But after they came, he drew back and kept himself separate for fear of the circumcision faction.

Simon is more commonly known by the name Jesus gave to him: Cephas (pronounced "Kee-fas" in Aramaic, "See-fus" in English, translated "Petros" in Greek, "Peter" in English); I'll call him Peter. So, Peter arrived in Antioch, the city where Paul lived, and came to the church where Paul ministered.

In Acts Chapter 12, we read that when Herod Agrippa imprisoned Peter in Jerusalem, an angel appeared in his cell and released him. Then Acts 12:17 adds, "he left for another place," which means he cleared out as quickly as possible. "Another place" may have been Antioch, which was outside of Herod's jurisdiction. After Herod Agrippa died in 44 A.D. it was safe for Peter and Paul to travel to Jerusalem. It helps us understand the big picture if we put all the facts together.

While at Antioch, Peter dined with non-Jewish people. This was his practice until a group of Jewish brothers visited from the church in Jerusalem, where James was the resident apostle. Judging from James' speech to the Jerusalem Council (Acts 15), James may well have been relieved when they left for Antioch. But they probably made out they had James' blessing on their teaching. The church at Antioch showed hospitality to the visitors. But the Jewish Christians excluded the Gentiles from their dinners because the visiting Jews said it was against God's law to eat with the uncircumcised. Didn't

God say to Abraham to circumcise every male in his household?

Genesis 17:12-14

> [12] Throughout your generations every male among you shall be circumcised when he is eight days old, including the slave born in your house and the one bought with your money from any foreigner who is not of your offspring. [13] Both the slave born in your house and the one bought with your money must be circumcised. So shall my covenant be in your flesh an everlasting covenant. [14] Any uncircumcised male who is not circumcised in the flesh of his foreskin shall be cut off from his people; he has broken my covenant.

The Hebrew Scriptures, our Old Testament, don't say that Jews must not eat with Gentiles. They say Jews and Gentiles must not inter-marry. But you never know what dining out together might lead to. ☺ The Jews felt superior since they were physical descendants of Abraham. Besides, the pagans ate meat sacrificed to idols and after conversion, they continued the practice. The Jewish Christians feared it opened up a person to demonic influence.

I have heard stories of tourists bringing back home an idol as a souvenir. They came under demonic attack until they got rid of it. So, the Judaisers were saying to the Jewish Christians, "If you want to keep yourselves clean, don't eat with Gentiles". We read in Acts 11:3 that the other disciples criticised Peter for eating with Gentiles and he defended his action by telling them of a vision he had received from God instructing him not to make a distinction between Gentiles and Jews.

So why did Peter attend the "Jews-only" dinner? Perhaps he thought it was okay to hold a dinner for their Jewish brothers. They had their reasons for not wanting to eat with the Gentiles.

It wasn't important to Peter. But Paul accused Peter of being afraid to offend the circumcision faction. Even in those early days of the church, the church had factions.

Peter had a history of not living up to his expressions of loyalty. On the night Jesus was arrested, a servant girl accused Peter of being a disciple of Christ, Peter denied knowing Him (Luke 22:56-57). In Antioch, Peter's concern for church unity might have been his priority. He might have been trying to avoid conflict and division with the Jewish Christians. Paul, himself, argued in 1 Cor 8 that eating food offered to idols is a non-essential matter, but for the sake of those weaker in the faith, the Corinthians should not eat it in the company of weaker Christians. Peter may have thought the matter was too unimportant to upset the visitors.

But look at what happened next.

Galatians 2:13

> [13] And the other Jews joined him in this hypocrisy, so that even Barnabas was led astray by their hypocrisy.

Even Barnabas, one of the three amigos, followed the crowd. Sheep stay with the flock, especially when the shepherd leading them is an apostle.

In ancient Greek theatre, hypocrisy meant that the actors played someone other than themselves. Actors used masks to portray a variety of characters or particular emotions by using happy and

sad masks. The masks were larger than life-size, so distant audience members could see them. But Paul used the term to call the troublemakers two-faced in proclaiming the gospel of grace, while telling the Gentiles they must become Jews.

Paul's response was swift.

Galatians 2:14

> [14] But when I saw that they were not acting consistently with the truth of the gospel, I said to Cephas before them all, "If you, though a Jew, live like a Gentile and not like a Jew, how can you compel the Gentiles to live like Jews?"

I suspect what happened was Titus showed up for dinner, but they said the dinner is a "Jews-only" affair. Titus went to Paul to complain. Paul wouldn't have mentioned this in his letter because it might cause trouble for his amigo. What upset Paul so much that he confronted Peter in front of the assembled Jewish Christians? A showdown between apostles!

In Paul's letter to the Romans, he encouraged Christians to live in harmony with each other. Paul was yet to write Romans, of course, but I presume he was of the same mind when he wrote Galatians. Paul said in Rom 12:18, "if it is possible, as far as it depends on you, live at peace with everyone". And in Rom 14:1 Paul wrote, "Accept him whose faith is weak, without passing judgement on disputable matters." Why wasn't the Antioch dinner a disputable matter?

Paul said in Rom 15:9, "Welcome one another… as Christ has welcomed you." Did Peter apply this both to the Gentiles and also to the Jewish faction? No.

To the contrary, Paul regarded this as striking at the heart of the gospel. He didn't see it as a disputable matter at all. Peter allowed his adherence to Jewish culture to disrupt fellowship with Gentile believers. But a split between Paul and Peter at this stage would have shattered the young church's unity.

Paul's stand against Peter and the other Jews foreshadowed the Council at Jerusalem described in Acts 15. Now, I should mention that some commentators say the meeting described earlier in Galatians Chapter 2 was the Council at Jerusalem. I think this possibility is unlikely because Peter, at the Council, stood with Paul opposing the circumcision faction. And Paul doesn't mention to the Galatians the Council's ruling on these issues, which suggests it hadn't happened at the time of his writing the letter.

Today's church sometimes allows other issues to break Christian fellowship. Issues such as water baptism, confirmation, ordination of ministers, speaking in tongues, women in ministry, and homosexuality. And if the church divides over such things, Paul would call it hypocrisy.

Paul's concern in Galatians was not so much how we become Christians as to how we live consistently as Christians. For Peter and Barnabas, Christian integrity required them to repent of the Jewish attitude of superiority and return to fellowship with their Gentile Christian friends.

Now let's read what Paul said to Peter and his fellow Jews assembled for dinner. This is the part that Martin Luther loved.

Galatians 2:15-16

> [15] We ourselves are Jews by birth and not Gentile sinners;
> [16] yet we know that a person is justified not by the works of the law but through faith in Jesus Christ. And we have come to believe in Christ Jesus, so that we might be justified by faith in Christ, and not by doing the works of

> the law, [and to make it abundantly clear Paul adds] because no one will be justified by the works of the law.

The Jews referred to Gentiles who did not have, or did not acknowledge God's law, as "sinners". This was Jewish prejudice towards outsiders who they called Gentile "sinners", even though they themselves were also sinners, and Paul reminded them of that fact. The Jewish Christians had accepted that salvation was through faith in Jesus. But they maintained a legalistic obedience to the laws of Moses which was a self-righteous way of trying to earn God's approval.

God, in His grace, reaches out to us sinners with mercy and forgiveness. The response of the sinner, in accepting God's forgiveness, admits of sin, but through Christ results in a restored relationship with God. Faith is the basis of every personal relationship, human and divine. Jesus urged everyone to have faith in God (Mark 11:22). Sin doesn't prevent you from having faith in God or forgiving other sinners.

The gospel is more than justification by faith and how God saves sinners. God created people to relate to each other and to God. God is a person. He is not a mere force, as in Star Wars' "the force be with you", or an abstract principle behind the universe. When the Bible says God made us in His image, it means He created us to relate to Him as children to a parent. The author of Genesis used "image" in this way when he said Adam became the father of Seth according to His image (Gen 5:3). This is the reason for the innate human desire to know God. Humans are social creatures with an inbuilt need for relationships. We want to experience God, but so often, like the Rolling Stones, we can't get no satisfaction. Faith is the way we relate to others, and that includes God. But just as human relationships take time to form, so do our relationships with God. It is worth spending your life in getting to know Him because nothing is more momentous than knowing God.

Paul, Peter and the other Jewish Christians agreed we cannot make ourselves right with God by our own good works. So, what was the problem? Let us read what happened.

Galatians 2:17-18

> [17] But if, in our effort to be justified in Christ, we ourselves have been found to be sinners, is Christ then a servant of sin? Certainly not! [18] But if I build up again the very things that I once tore down, then I demonstrate that I am a transgressor.

Paul here countered the phrase "We ourselves are Jews by birth and not Gentile sinners" by saying we Jews ourselves are sinners. But Christians do not involve Christ in their sin because He saved them from sin. Jesus is not implicated in sin because He lets sinful Christians off the hook. He didn't come as judge, but as Saviour. Sin is our doing. We can't blame God for failing to prevent us from sinning or not punishing sin. Our sin is the very reason we need a Saviour.

If we continue to live in sin after repenting from sin, we only show that we are transgressors. Our faith drives the works of faith. Paul called this "the obedience of faith" (Rom 1:5 & 16:26). James said, faith without works is dead and Paul agreed because he wrote in Gal 5:6, "the only thing that counts is faith working through love". God seeks a relationship with the faithful, a relationship characterised by works of love and mutual affection.

When we enter a relationship with God by faith, we don't need to win His love. God could not possibly love you any more than He already does. John 3:16 says God so loved the world that He gave His only son. His love for you is not conditional on your performance. If we try to earn God's approval, we deny the gospel. This is why Paul was so angry. This is not a disputable issue.

If we are still sinners, how can we live faithful lives? Paul explains.

Galatians 2:19-20

> [19] For through the law I died to the law, so that I might live to God. I have been crucified with Christ; [20] and it is no longer I who live, but it is Christ who lives in me. And the life I now live in the flesh I live by faith in the Son of God, who loved me and gave himself for me.

The law of God convicted Paul of sin and condemned him to death, but he had found another way to live to God.

What does Paul mean by saying he had been crucified with Christ? He obviously was alive and well. The Romans criticised Christians in the first century for worshipping someone the Romans had crucified. Only an enemy of the State or a criminal was crucified. The Jews thought the curse of God rested on a crucified person. So, the cross was a sticking point for Jews and Gentiles alike.

Paul no longer saw himself as better than the Gentiles because he was Jewish. He realised everyone is sinful. The life of sin in this present evil age, as Paul called it in Chapter 1, wasn't a life worth living. He acknowledged his sin and placed his faith in Jesus for his salvation. He figuratively died to the world, just as Christ actually died to the world. What Paul intended by saying he had been crucified with Christ was that he no longer tried to save himself using the means of a corrupt world. He had left the rat race.

Paul took hold of the taunts thrown at the crucified Messiah and threw them back at those who reject their Saviour. He said in effect, "They mock us because they crucified Jesus, but their efforts to justify themselves before God are futile." Paul said in effect, "I no longer live that way, I have died to that nonsense.

Just as self-righteous people crucified Christ, I will crucify my self-righteousness!”

Paul didn't sell his soul to this world. He counselled us not to respond to sin with sin. When we get criticised for being Christians, we shouldn’t respond in like manner. Paul wrote in Romans 12:21, “overcome evil with good”. This is the way of Christ, who even refused to exploit His divinity by appealing to God to send angels to rescue Him from His executioners (Matt 26:53). He wouldn’t fight back using the world’s ways.

As Paul said in Romans 6:11 “consider yourselves to be dead to sin, but alive to God in Christ Jesus.” If someone offends you, instead of responding by hitting back, let the flesh be unresponsive, dead, so to speak. In so doing, you overcome evil with good.

I hasten to add, this does not mean you should always passively submit to another’s sin against you. In cases of domestic violence or bullying, it is advisable to leave the situation and report it to authorities. But retaliating in kind only increases the sin. Harbouring bitterness and holding on to resentment only hurts yourself.

Paul said he lived by faith in the Son of God, who loved us and gave Himself for us. The life of faith brings us into the company of the Holy Spirit. We are no longer subject to an external law, but follow the indwelling Spirit of Christ. This is what Jeremiah prophesied about the New Covenant: that God would write the law on our hearts (Jer 31:33). Let’s read on.

Galatians 2: 21

> [21] I do not nullify the grace of God; for if justification comes through the law, then Christ died for nothing.

We are free from self-justification, of trying to please God by being good. We would only be good sinners. It is our pride

and self-righteousness that make us think we can be good enough to stand before a holy God. Since God is omnipresent, He is here with us now. But in another sense, He keeps His distance from this evil world or else His holiness would destroy it, and us.

The Son of God didn't enter the world for a holiday. The human condition Jesus embraced included death. Jesus was always going to die. Satan made Jesus' death as horrible as possible to try to persuade Him to abandon His mission to save humanity.

Jesus did not just remove our condemnation for sin. He freed us from trying to be good enough. We are free from working hard, doing good, and striving to be acceptable to God. Jesus says, come, let's be friends, you can trust me with your life. You don't need to do anything to make yourselves right with God.

The gospel can break into our sinful lives like a thunderbolt on a sunny day. We get taken by surprise. Paul had a dramatic conversion. The more startling our conversion, the greater the gospel affects us. Paul plainly saw the hypocrisy, whereas Peter did not.

After becoming a Christian, it sometimes takes time for the implications to dawn on us so that we start living consistently with the gospel. Sin clouds our minds and hearts and makes us too dull to perceive the ramifications of the gospel. But the truth will shine in the dark places of our lives.

A modern example where Christians do not obey the truth is the prosperity gospel, which says God blesses the finances of the godly. Some church giving-talks urge people to give generously so that God will reward them. "You can't out-give God," they say. God wants you to prosper so you can give even more. The appeal to fleshly desires is opposed to the Spirit.

Let us give priority to our relationship with the Holy Spirit. No one can earn God's favour by doing good works or resisting sinful works. Just honour the Son, believe in Him. Peter wouldn't have forgotten when Jesus said, "This is the work of God, that you believe in him whom he has sent." (John 6:29).

We know Peter repented of his hypocrisy in Antioch because, at the Council of Jerusalem the following year, he spoke up for the truth of the gospel alongside Paul. We don't have to earn the right to be in God's family. If that were possible, Christ died for nothing (vs 21). But Christ has won the victory. So, we live now as members of God's family, children adopted by the grace of God and sharing His love in the world.

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5. Faith and Law

Galatians 3:1-14

Paul's letter to the Galatians changes direction at the point we call Chapter 3. In Chapters 1 & 2 Paul presented his testimony to confirm his authority and affirm that Jesus Christ gave him the gospel through a revelation. Then he explained how we are justified before God by faith. That was the part where the penny dropped for Martin Luther. His search for God was over, and he thought Galatians could have finished at the end of Chapter 2.

But, Luther sold himself short. There was more to come. The gospel is bigger than justification by faith. Paul wanted to make sure the Galatians understood the whole gospel.

Before we turn to the passage, I need to give a word of explanation regarding the translation. Bible Societies are endeavouring to translate the Bible into every language still being spoken. This is because it is easier to understand the Bible in your own language. Even in your own language, the

various versions of the Bible differ considerably. For example, Martin Luther saw Galatians as applying to the German church of his time and he translated the Bible into German. So, I will use my own Australian version. You might have wondered how Galatians would sound if Paul was writing to Australians. Wonder no more. Here it is. I include English NRSV subtitles underneath each verse in blue for the non-Australian readers. Chapter 3 starts as follows.

Galatians 3:1-14

[1] You stupid Australians! Strewth, who pulled the wool over your eyes? I told you to your face that Jesus Christ was crucified, dead and buried!

> [1] You foolish Galatians! Who has bewitched you? It was before your eyes that Jesus Christ was publicly exhibited as crucified! [NRSV]

[2] Tell me one thing, Bruces and Sheilas: Did you receive the Spirit by being a goodie-goodie, or by being mates with Christ?

> [2] The only thing I want to learn from you is this: Did you receive the Spirit by doing the works of the law or by believing what you heard?

[3] Do you have a few roos loose in the top paddock? You started with the Spirit, so why do all the hard yakka to finish?

> [3] Are you so foolish? Having started with the Spirit, are you now ending with the flesh?

[4] Did you go through so much for nothing? You couldn't be such galahs.

> [4] Did you experience so much for nothing? — if it really was for nothing.

[5] Tell me, did God give you the Spirit and work miracles among you because you were such top blokes, or because you were mates with His Son?

[5] Well then, does God supply you with the Spirit and work miracles among you by your doing the works of the law, or by your believing what you heard?

[6] Remember, “Abraham believed God, and God thought it was a little ripper”

[6] Just as Abraham “believed God, and it was reckoned to him as righteousness,”

[7] and so, those who believe are walking in Abraham's footsteps.

[7] so, you see, those who believe are the descendants of Abraham.

[8] God knew He was going to sort out the Aussies by faith, so He said to Abraham ahead of time, “All the Aussies are going to be stoked in you.”

[8] And the scripture, foreseeing that God would justify the Gentiles by faith, declared the gospel beforehand to Abraham, saying, “All the Gentiles shall be blessed in you.”

[9] So, you see, people who believe get the same fair go as Abraham who believed.

[9] For this reason, those who believe are blessed with Abraham who believed.

[10] Relying on your own efforts is like going walkabout, for the Bible says, “Cactus is everyone who does not observe and obey every little thing written in the book of the law.”

[10] For all who rely on the works of the law are under a curse; for it is written, “Cursed is everyone who does not observe and obey all the things written in the book of the law.”

[11] It's a furphy that anyone could be justified before God by the law, for the Bible says, “The one who is true-blue will live by faith.”

[11] Now it is evident that no one is justified before God by the law; for “The one who is righteous will live by faith.”

[12] The law, on the other hand, is not a matter of being a good sport because it is written, “You have Buckley's chance of doing the works of the law, or you would live by them.”

[12] But the law does not rest on faith; on the contrary, “Whoever does the works of the law will live by them.”

[13] Christ saved us from the dog's breakfast of the law by being stonkered for us — for it is written, “Stonkered is everyone who is strung up on a tree” —

[13] Christ redeemed us from the curse of the law by becoming a curse for us — for it is written, “Cursed is everyone who hangs on a tree” —

[14] so that through Christ Jesus the promise to Abraham might come to the Aussies, and we might receive the promised Spirit through mateship with Christ. You beaudy. [Or Amen.]

[14] in order that in Christ Jesus the blessing of Abraham might come to the Gentiles, so that we might receive the promise of the Spirit through faith.

Wasn’t that easier to understand? I hardly need to explain it to you. But I will, otherwise this chapter will be rather short.

Galatians 3:1-14 has three paragraphs, which I will discuss under three headings as follows.

1. Galatians 3:1-5. Salvation is through faith not by doing the works of the law.

Look at verse 1.

You stupid Australians [and people of Galatia]

Remember the region of Galatia was named after the Gauls that lived in the north. Those who lived in the south of the province did not like being called Gauls. But Paul could get away with it because he came from nearby Tarsus. It is like me as an Australian saying we Australians are being stupid. I can get away with it, whereas someone from another country would not.

Still, would you invite Paul to come to your church after he writes to you like that? And in case you missed it he added in verse 3, “Do you have a few roos loose in the top paddock”?

One commentator tried defending Paul’s sharp language by saying sometimes stern words are needed to get our attention. I think Paul was simply speaking his mind in love. He personally knew the Galatians. He had a strong relationship with them that wouldn’t be harmed by him trying to shame them back into God’s family. But why was Paul so dismayed at the Galatians?

No matter in what language you are reading this, Paul starts his barrage with a series of six questions to make the Galatians think.

1) who pulled the wool over your eyes?

2) Did you receive the Spirit by being a good sport, or by being mates with Christ?

3) Do you have a few roos loose in the top paddock?

4) You started with the Spirit, so why do all the hard yakka to finish?

5) Did you go through so much for nothing?

6) Did God give you the Spirit and work miracles among you because you were such top blokes, or because you were mates with His Son?

A false teaching had deceived the Galatians. Why didn't they recognise it as wrong? The New Revised Standard Version says in verse 1, "It was before your eyes that Jesus Christ was publicly exhibited as crucified!" Now the Galatians were not present at Christ's crucifixion. Nor were we. They heard about it from Paul who openly declared that Christ was crucified. He didn't hide the difficult fact that Jesus was executed, or that the Messiah who Christians worship did not come as a conquering king.

Verses 3-5

The Galatian Christians started with faith. In verse 4, Paul said they experienced much. This might mean they suffered persecution, but in the light of verse 5, it is more likely to mean that they had seen God work miracles among them. But they would trade their freedom from the law for bondage to the law if they accepted the false teaching.

Paul wasn't talking about the laws of Australia or the Roman Empire. But still, the word law had several meanings for Paul and his contemporaries.

1) The law of Moses or one specific commandment.

2) The first five books of the Bible, called the Pentateuch or Torah.

3) The entire Old Testament.

4) A principle, such as, the love commandment.

5) The Jewish religion, because it was distinguished by its adherence to God's law.

6) Legalism. There was no separate word in the Greek language for legalism. They understood the intended meaning of the Greek word "*nomos*" from the context.

So, when Paul used the word "law", he could intend any one of these meanings, or even several of them. We have to examine the context, but often ambiguity remains. Perhaps where there was ambiguity, Paul was happy for all options to apply. But I need to elaborate on the 6th item on my list, legalism.

What is legalism?

Jesus criticised the legalistic attitude of the Pharisees. Legalism says, "I have a right to the reward if I do the legal requirements." There is no grace or humility involved. Obedience, for the legalist, is to the letter of the law, not the spirit. Self-centred pride remains intact. Legalism is self-serving.

Satan uses legalism to tempt us with pride in being satisfied with our performance, or else he attacks us with discouragement for failing to perform. Legalism is similar to moralism, which follows rules of moral behaviour instead of seeking guidance from the Holy Spirit. Our enemy wants us to be satisfied in following the moral rules of our society and to use them to condemn those who don't. Religious moralism was declared to be heresy at the Council of Ephesus in 431 C.E. and

came to be called Pelagianism, after a monk who was supposedly teaching it.

Legalism looks different today to its manifestation in the first century: we don't concern ourselves over Jewish religious laws. But sometimes people think they need to win God's approval, or they insist baptism should be for adults only, or whether sprinkling with water or total immersion is the right means of baptism. Some deliberate whether they should honour Saturday or Sunday as the sabbath day. They have their reasons for these things but it is the attitude that causes the pride and disunity.

To be honest, most of us get caught up in legalism sometimes. We might ask ourselves:

> Am I giving enough to the church?
>
> Is God angry with me for missing church last week?
>
> Is God punishing me for not being a good Christian?
>
> Do I pray enough?
>
> Should I try fasting to get God's attention?
>
> If I make a wrong choice, will God be angry with me?

The Galatian Christians asked themselves these sorts of questions, too.

In Paul's view, the law of Moses did not offer a means of salvation. There are not two ways of salvation, one based on human ability to keep the commandments and the other based on God's provision, to which we respond in faith. Paul said that Scripture only offered one way of salvation, through faith in God.

The problem with legalists in Galatia or Australia is not their endeavour to keep the law, but in misinterpreting the law. They take what is good and twist it to support their self-righteousness. Paul did not view the Old Testament story of God's people as teaching what Jews and Gentiles have to do to become God's people. Scripture is the story of God's people, not what Israel did to become God's people. Christians can say, "look what the Lord has done" and not "Look what I have done to please God."

Let's move on to Paul's second paragraph and my second heading.

2. Galatians 3:6-9. Salvation is through faith not by doing the works of the law.

Verses 6-9, the example of Abraham, goes like this.

1) Abraham believed God.

2) Those who believe are Abraham's offspring.

3) God blesses everyone who believes.

4) Our own efforts fall short.

In verses 6-9, Paul laid out Abraham's example of faith and God's promise to him that God's blessing and approval would rest on those who have faith. This comprised both Abraham's physical descendants, the Jews, and those non-Jews who are like him because of their faith and are therefore his spiritual descendants.

Paul in verse 6 quoted Genesis 15:6 to show that the Lord accepted Abraham's faith as righteousness. Scripture makes it clear that Abraham was sinful. But just as what you do doesn't save you, it doesn't make you unsavable either. God is looking

for people of faith. God's promise to Abraham, that he would be a blessing to the nations, is found in **Genesis 12:1-3**.

> [1] Now the LORD said to Abram, "Go from your country and your kindred and your father's house to the land that I will show you. [2] I will make of you a great nation, and I will bless you, and make your name great, so that you will be a blessing. [3] I will bless those who bless you, and the one who curses you I will curse; and in you all the families of the earth shall be blessed."

When Zacchaeus, the tax collector, placed his faith in Jesus and repented from his life of sin, Jesus called him "a son of Abraham" because of his profession of faith. Jesus implied sons of Abraham are people of faith, not just Abrahams' physical descendants. You can read about Zacchaeus in Luke 19:1-10.

When Jesus said, "... those who have done good will rise to live, and those who have done evil will rise to be condemned" (John 5:29, NIV), He was speaking of the works of faith. Jesus said in John 6:29 the work of God is to believe in the one He sent. In the Old Testament (Isaiah 1:14), God said He was tired of humanity's works done to please Him.

The laws of God are good because they show us how to live. They don't show us how to become sons and daughters of God, but because we are sons and daughters of God, He gives us His law. Now to my last point.

3. Galatians 3:10-14. Salvation is through faith not by doing the works of the law.

If you have been paying attention, you would have noticed that all three of my headings above are the same. Blame Paul, not me. In this paragraph, Paul appealed to the Old Testament to show that obedience to God's laws didn't save anyone. Yet

Scripture reveals God wants to have a relationship with us. He believes in us. Just as humans don't build loving relationships with one another by their ability to comply with rules, neither do works of obedience win God's love.

Verse 10

Paul quoted Deuteronomy 27:26, "Cactus is everyone who does not observe and obey every little thing written in the book of the law." It is not just our inability to keep the law, but that law obedience is not how relationships are built. For example, the road rules are good for getting the bus you are on safely to its destination. But they have little relevance to your relationship with your uncle who is driving the bus.

Verse 11

Habakkuk 2:4 says, "The one who is true-blue will live by faith." Even a minor prophet understood salvation could only be by faith. Yet the Judaisers wrongly claimed they were advocating scriptural teaching.

Verse 12

Paul quoted Leviticus 18:5 ("You shall keep my statutes and my ordinances; by doing so one shall live: I am the LORD.") and Ezekiel 20:11 ("I gave them my statutes and showed them my ordinances, by whose observance everyone shall live.") both of which say you shall live if you obey the law. But Paul said, "You have Buckley's chance of **doing** the works of the law." He didn't see the law as a viable means of salvation.

Verse 13

"Stonkered is everyone who is strung up on a tree". The scripture quoted is Deut 21:23. I didn't use the word "curse"

because it sounds like pointing a bone or using magic to place a curse on someone. God doesn't behave like the devil. Anyone executed in public was definitely stonkered, but God didn't join in the revenge. The "curse" of public execution was by human society, not God.

Verse 14

When God first called Abraham, God promised Abraham that he would be a blessing to all the families of earth (Genesis 12:3). Isaiah 44:3 echoed this promise: "For I will pour water on the thirsty land, and streams on the dry ground; I will pour my spirit upon your descendants, and my blessing on your offspring."

Joel 2:28-29 gave God's promise of the Spirit: "Then afterward I will pour out my spirit on all flesh; your sons and your daughters shall prophesy, your old men shall dream dreams, and your young men shall see visions.Even on the male and female slaves, in those days, I will pour out my spirit."

How could the Jewish false teachers overlook these passages? Maybe it was the usual problems of seeing what we want to see or having a worldview that is blind to God's ways.

Summing Up

Paul hammered one point using multiple arguments, and that point was: Salvation is by the grace of God through faith, and not by doing the works of the law.

It is instructive to consider why God saves us through faith and not something else, such as love. The answer concerns how faith works in relationships. Let's use the marriage relationship as an illustration. People get married in western countries because they love each other. In India, China, the middle east, African and southeast Asian countries, arranged marriages

predominate. So, over half of the world's marriages are planned by others. In the west, the divorce rate can be as high as 50%. But for arranged marriages, the divorce rate is less than 4%. Even considering cultural pressure to stay married, the difference is remarkable.

The couple in an arranged marriage believe their parents will make the right choice and that their partner will commit themselves to them. In western countries, the couple themselves decide if they will commit themselves to each other. Some couples will live together before getting married to help them decide whether they can commit themselves to the other person. In the west, where we view the world in materialistic terms and extol individualism, we struggle to understand faith. Faith connects us to others. It is characterised by personal commitment and trust. Inter-personal relationships, including our relationship with God, are connections that depend on our belief in one another, regardless of what happens. John Wimber used to say faith is spelt R-I-S-K. It is risky, but God is faithful. Will we, however, have faith in God? Love or the works of love can't save us. Love and good works flow from faith, not the other way around. We shouldn't put the cart before the horse. This is why Paul was upset with the Galatians.

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6. Promise and Law

Galatians 3:15-29

We are halfway through Paul's letter to the Galatians. This chapter deals with promise and law. First, Paul talked about God's promise to be God to His people. In Galatians 3:15, Paul gave an example to illustrate God's faithfulness to His promises.

The Promise to Abraham

Galatians 3:15-16

15 Brothers and sisters, I give an example from daily life:
once a person's will has been ratified, no one adds to it or
annuls it. 16 Now the promises were made to Abraham
and to his offspring; it does not say, "And to offsprings,"
as of many; but it says, "And to your offspring," that is,
to one person, who is Christ.

It isn't something one does every day, but making a will is a common occurrence. A Will is a legal document where you set out how you want your possessions distributed after you die. I've made several wills in my lifetime. My latest one is with the Public Trustee. By latest, I mean my Last Will and Testament. You can't add to, or change, a Will, you have to make a new one, and then it becomes your Last Will, which is the only one that counts.

Some things have changed little over the last 4,000 years since Abraham's time. But some things have changed. The Public Trustee has a checklist on its computers. One of the Public Trustee checklist questions was "who do you want to leave your gym equipment to?" My wife Margaret and I said we don't own any gym equipment. The Public Trustee officer replied, "If you get some, we need to know what to do with it". Our reason for using the Public Trustee was so they will do the executor's job. I can imagine what is going to happen after we die. The Public Trustee will search for the gym equipment. I may purchase a medicine ball to make it easier for them. Margaret already has her 500g dumbbell. When the wills were completed, they printed them out and witnessed our signatures. This is what Paul means by a person's will being ratified.

Margaret and I both made wills leaving our fortunes to each other, or if we are both dead, to our offsprings, as of many. But in Paul's example, God's promise to Abraham passed only to one offspring, who is Christ. In theory, you could leave your fortune to a descendant not yet born. But who would do that? You cannot be sure they will be worthy of your estate. However, 4,000 years ago God was planning to send His own Son, whom He knew from all eternity. God was confident that Jesus, God's Son in human form, would be worthy.

In verse 16, Paul sounds pedantic in trying to make something out of "offspring" being singular and not plural,

even though in English it can be a collective noun. The Jews themselves used this argument because Abraham had two sons, but the promise came through only one, Isaac, and not Ishmael, and through Isaac to the Jews.

You might wonder, "what is the point of all this talk about wills?" After all, unlike us, God never dies. It was Abraham and his descendants who died. Did the law replace God's will? Paul expected your question.

The Promise of God Galatians 3:17-18

> [17] My point is this: the law, which came four hundred thirty years later, does not annul a covenant previously ratified by God, so as to nullify the promise. [18] For if the inheritance comes from the law, it no longer comes from the promise; but God granted it to Abraham through the promise.

In verses 17 & 18, Paul argued that because God made the promise to Abraham 430 years before He gave the law to Moses, God must have saved people who lived before Moses through faith. God hadn't given the law yet, so He couldn't have saved people who lived before the law was decreed through obedience to the law.

The giving of the law did not cancel the promise of God, nor was God adding the law to His Last Will and Testament. Many non-Christians think Christianity teaches that God rewards people with heaven for a life of obedience to the rules. Of course not! That wouldn't be good news, it would be hard work doomed to failure. Let's look at the law.

2. The Law

By "the law" Paul doesn't mean the law of the ruling authority, Rome in his case, but the law of God He gave to

Moses. Now this raises another question. What is the purpose of the law if it doesn't save us?

Galatians 3:19-20

> [19] Why then the law? It was added because of transgressions, until the offspring would come to whom the promise had been made; and it was ordained through angels by a mediator. [20] Now a mediator involves more than one party; but God is one.

"Why then the law?" In verse 19, Paul said God added it because of transgressions. God aimed to expose wrongdoing and curb sin. The law played no role in earning God's approval. It still doesn't. Even in the Garden of Eden, before God made the promise to Abraham, salvation was not through doing good works.

The mediator for the law was Moses, who received the law of God delivered to him by angels. Deuteronomy 33:2 speaks of the involvement of "myriads of holy ones" (angels) at Sinai. This was the common understanding in the first century as attested by Stephen's speech in Acts 7:38 & 53, and in Hebrews 2:2. Outside of the Bible, first century Jewish historian, Josephus, mentioned the mediation of angels in the giving of the law. But with human laws someone must act as law enforcement and judge. Paul's point was that law involves a mediator. However, no mediator is required between God and Israel. God is one and there is no other. His promises stand.

In case you are thinking that Scripture speaks of Christ as a mediator, He is not a mediator in the sense of a go-between. Christ is God in human form, a mediator in Himself bestowing salvation on the faithful. He is both divine and human, redeeming the captives. The Holy Spirit uses the law to show us our sin and need of a Saviour, which brings us to the next question.

Galatians 3:21

> Is the law then opposed to the promises of God? Certainly not! For if a law had been given that could make alive, then righteousness would indeed come through the law.

Moses recorded the Ten Commandments in Exodus 20. He prefaced the Ten Commandments in Exodus 20:1-2 by reminding Israel of God's covenant and their freedom from slavery by the grace of God: "Then God spoke all these words: I am the Lord your God, who brought you out of Egypt." Moses, himself, didn't purport to set out another way of salvation, that of obeying the law. Israel *was* God's people. God gave them His commandments as a father to His children. We can see how much they needed the commandments for guidance from their worshipping a golden calf at the base of Mount Sinai while Moses received the law on the mountain (Exodus 32).

The law is not opposed to the promise. I once attended a conference on grace by Ken Blue, an American pastor and author. He said something that was very memorable. He said the reason we avoid sin is the same reason you wouldn't put your face in a meat grinder: it hurts and disfigures you. The law was a gift for Israel's blessing. God cares about His people, that is why He gave them His law—so they didn't get hurt from their own sin or from others, and so they didn't lose their identity as God's people. Now you won't be able to forget the meat grinder illustration either. Sorry about that. ☺

The apostle John said something in his gospel that is puzzling unless you see the law in this positive light. **John 1:16-17** says, "From his fullness we have all received, grace upon grace. The law indeed came through Moses; grace and truth came through Jesus Christ." John spoke of the law as

a good thing, a gift of God's grace, even though it doesn't give anyone eternal life, it helps us avoid sin that hurts and disfigures us. Now back to Galatians, verse 22.

Galatians 3:22-23

> [22] But the scripture has imprisoned all things under the power of sin, so that what was promised through faith in Jesus Christ might be given to those who believe.
>
> [23] Now before faith came, we were imprisoned and guarded under the law until faith would be revealed.

When Paul said Scripture has imprisoned all things, he didn't mean Scripture takes us captive by force. He was illustrating how Scripture presents the truth that sin pervades the world. We live in a world fallen from its intended glory. But now a new truth has been revealed, faith in Jesus Christ. We are no longer under law.

Galatians 3:24-27

> [24] Therefore the law was our disciplinarian until Christ came, so that we might be justified by faith. [25] But now that faith has come, we are no longer subject to a disciplinarian, [26] for in Christ Jesus you are all children of God through faith. [27] As many of you as were baptised into Christ have clothed yourselves with Christ.

A disciplinarian, like a children's guardian, seeks to correct behaviour and stop a child running riot. The law acted as a disciplinarian for God's people until Jesus came (verses 24-25). Helmut Thielicke, a German theologian, visited Sydney in 1978, and a theology student asked him to comment on the place of the law in Christianity. Helmut suggested God used the law in a corrective way.

He illustrated with a story. God's people are like a flock of sheep following their shepherd. But sometimes sheep stray from the flock. The law comes along as a sheep-dog nipping at their legs and barking to chase them back to the safety of the flock. You can substitute geese for sheep; or people. ☺

Verse 26 affirms that we are God's children by faith in Jesus Christ. Jesus' life of faith and perfect obedience secured the promise. Our hope of eternal life is so sure that Jesus said, "Those who eat my flesh and drink my blood [i.e. those who

believe in me to the extent of partaking in my life] have eternal life, and I will bring them back to life on the last day" (John 6:54). Note Jesus said "have eternal life", not "one day will have", for Christians already possess eternal life. God changed our status through Christ.

Verse 27 mentions baptism. Churches use various approaches to baptism. They might dunk the candidate in water, sprinkle or pour water over them. The candidate may be an adult or infant. Baptised infants can confirm the promises made on their behalf when they are adults, or even be re-baptised in some churches. Normally, the church only baptises a person once. Churches don't re-baptise a person who falls away from Christ and later returns. Even if we're not faithful, God remains faithful.

3. One in Christ

The gift of the law and the Promise of God change us. People immersed in this evil age are taken by surprise by God's mercy. Verse 28 is at the heart of Galatians.

Galatians 3:28

> There is no longer Jew or Greek, there is no longer slave or free, there is no longer male and female; for all of you are **one in Christ Jesus**.

Of course, there were still Jews and Greeks, slaves and free people, men and women, but they were one in Christ, united by faith. And if our common bond unites us with Christ, we can't feel we are better than any others. The Jews could not consider themselves superior to the Gentiles. There were no grounds to require the Gentiles to obey Jewish laws. Slave owners had to rethink their justification for owning another person, but it would take hundreds of years for Christians to give up their slaves and teach others it was the right thing to do. Men had to

accept women as equals, yet even today in some church denominations, women may not fill positions equivalent to men. They argue for male headship by saying men and women have different roles in the church. The church still has work to do.

Paul wasn't so much angry at the Galatians, as at the false believers who were confusing them. They had duped the Galatians. Paul was furious with Satan and those who did his work. He would be even madder today. God's enemies deceive billions of people. 2 billion Muslims, 1.2 billion non-religious people, 1.2 billion Hindus, 500 million Buddhists, and so on. Only 30% of the world's population is Christian. The church has work to do.

John 3:16 states, "For God so loved the world that he gave his only Son so that everyone who believes in him may not perish but may have eternal life." So, the church's proclamation of the gospel is about eternal life and death. Satan hates us. Why? God made us in His own image, the devil's arch-enemy. Perhaps, Satan imagines if he can draw enough humans away from Christ, God will relent from judging them, and Satan would avoid punishment, too.

But God sent His Son because there was no other way to save humanity. Remember Jesus in the Garden of Gethsemane asked His Father to save Him from crucifixion, if at all possible. It wasn't. Don't embrace Satan's lie that it doesn't matter what you believe or who you place your faith in. Get angry at Satan, not God. It is not politically correct to respect the lies of the devil. A country where the dominant religion is not Christianity pressures its citizens to accept the lies. Respect persons in spite of their deception, but don't give any respect to the deception that seeks to draw people away from their Saviour. The church has work to do.

Now we come to the last verse in Chapter 3:

Galatians 3:29

> And if you belong to Christ, then you are Abraham's offspring, heirs according to the promise.

Those who believe in Christ, are one with Him and so, with Him, are Abraham's offspring and therefore heirs of God's promise. Paul regarded people of faith as the descendants of Abraham. Like a Last Will and Testament, God does not cancel or change His promise. What is the inheritance? Eternal life. God wants to save us from sin. He wants us to enjoy eternal life. God can achieve this. We can be confident He will do it.

Paul's Three Points.

Paul made three points in this section.

1. The Promise of God is for everyone with faith in Him.

Eternal life means that God has adopted us into His family. We don't have to earn our heavenly father's love. He loves us. We are free from the burden of trying to earn God's approval.

2. The law of God is not a performance criterion for eternal life. It's a gift.

God gave Israel laws to live by for their own benefit and to help form then into a nation and be the physical forebears of His Son. Obedience to God's laws was never a way to earn salvation. Besides, many of the laws are now obsolete, especially to Gentiles. Neither should we see obedience to God's laws as the way we earn rewards for good behaviour. Such self-righteousness is itself a sin.

3. We are one in Christ.

Christians together form the citizenship of the kingdom of heaven. By faith, we receive both the Father's love and the Spirit's power to make us more like Christ. Being Christ-like doesn't mean we lose our unique personalities or identities, but we lose our sin, which is not a bad thing. Of course, our sinful nature will never become sinless in this world, so it must die. But death has lost its sting as Paul said elsewhere (1 Corinthians 15:55). We will be raised to righteousness.

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7. Free as a Bird

Galatians 4:1-11

Here is some trivia for you. “Free as a Bird” was the Beatles second last record released in 1995 (the last was “Real Love” released a year later). They used a demo tape made by John Lennon in 1977, which was years after the Beatles disbanded. Free as a bird is a common saying. Freedom itself means free from some constraint; with birds, it’s gravity, hence the phrase free as a bird. With humans, we struggle against the devil’s lies.

Galatians Chapter 4 deals with this issue of the devil’s lies. It is the longest chapter in the letter, so I will divide it into three sections, which we will review in the next three chapters. The three sections relate to three lies of Satan: (1) lies about God, (2) lies concerning who we are, and (3) lies regarding personal relationships. The devil’s lies relate to other things too, but Paul uses these three to show how Christ’s truth

dispels lies. In this chapter we will look at Galatians 4:1-11, which relates to the lies Satan spreads about God.

Lies, Freedom and Truth

First, a few words about deception generally. Let's hear from Jesus who called Satan the father of lies.

John 8:44

> You are from your father the devil, and you choose to do your father's desires. He was a murderer from the beginning and does not stand in the truth, because there is no truth in him. When he lies, he speaks according to his own nature, for he is a liar and the father of lies.

The demons, evil spirits and fallen angels who follow Satan are no different in their behaviour to their leader. And yet people believe them. Sometimes, Christians working in deliverance ministry get tricked. If you command a demon in Jesus' name to disclose its name and mission, you can't accept whatever it says as true. They are not trying to help you but to deceive you and make trouble. For example, When Jesus cast out a demon, this happened.

Mark 3:11-12

> [11] Whenever the unclean spirits saw him, they fell down before him and shouted, "You are the Son of God!" [12] But he sternly ordered them not to make him known.

Even when Jesus cast out unclean spirits, they tried to cause trouble. Scripture uses the title, "Son of God", of Adam (Luke 3:38) and Israel (Exod 4:22-23; Hosea 11:1). The Roman Emperor Augustus called himself a son of the gods. The unclean spirit in this example wasn't being respectful, but trying to cause trouble for Jesus by accusing Him of usurping the Emperor's title.

Once, in the 1980s, I served on a Sydney Anglican Synod Committee investigating Freemasonry. I had heard stories of demons being cast out of Freemasons claiming they were demons of Freemasonry. But demons lie to cause trouble and to deceive. Our committee found no evidence the lodges were hotbeds of Satanism. Freemasonry admits to religious teaching, but not to being a religion. The problem is the religious teaching of Freemasonry is justification by works. The real danger of Freemasonry is its religious teaching, which precludes the gospel from its rituals and tells men that Freemasonry will help them become better men.

Satan's most dangerous lies are aimed at God. One of these lies is the commonplace deception of legalism, the matter Paul pondered in Galatians 4:1-11. Legalism is a misuse of the law. Instead of the law being a gift from God to help us avoid sin, it becomes either a tool of discouragement because we don't measure up, or a temptation to pride in our good works. In our sin, we use the law as a weapon to attack others. We fall for these lies if we doubt God's goodness.

Adam and Eve in the Garden of Eden, were deceived by Satan into questioning God's goodness.

Genesis 3:4-5

> [4] But the serpent said to the woman, "You will not die;
> [5] for God knows that when you eat of it your eyes will be opened, and you will be like God, knowing good and evil."

Behind the temptation to eat the forbidden fruit, Satan insinuated God was withholding something desirable from humanity, implying God isn't altogether good. Adam and Eve sinned when they ate the fruit, but they had already sinned in their hearts when they accepted the lie that God was holding back on them.

It is the same with legalistic religion. Legalism is a misbelief about God and why He gave us the law. Instead of seeing the law as a wonderful gift from God to help us, we turn the law into a burden as we try to justify ourselves before God. As if our obedience to laws impresses God. This is self-justification and self-righteousness deriving from human pride and alienation.

Legalistic religion depicts a God who disapproves of us. Are you sometimes tempted to suspect God isn't pleased with you? He doesn't care about you? That God is unpredictable, temperamental, and prone to getting angry with people?

These lies do not square with God as a benevolent father that Paul described in Galatians 4:1-11. He loves you and cares for you. But Satan whispers in our ears, the church is hopeless, society is going to the dogs, and you don't measure up either.

Jesus had three comebacks.

1) Satan is a liar.

2) The truth will set you free. Free from what? Just as light dispels darkness, truth exposes lies. Truth sets us free from lies.

3) Jesus said that He is the truth. He is truth incarnate; what He says is not only true, He is truth made personal.

Many people today believe truth is relative. They think we should accept everyone's right to their view. Your beliefs may contradict mine, but if "it's true for you", then it's "right for you". Experience is the primary test of truth. If it works for you, if it feels right, it's okay.

With these lies deeply embedded in our culture, the church is vulnerable to Satan's lies. For believers, the temptation is to

say the important thing is that you love Jesus, not who you believe Jesus is or whether you accept His teaching. Satan tells us lies about God, about Jesus, ourselves and how we should relate to God.

For instance, there are always some church members who oppose what God does in revivals. George Whitefield and John Wesley preached the new birth and having a personal relationship with God in the revival of the 18th century, called the Great Awakening in the USA. Some in the established church were unhappy that they taught "you must be born again". Looking back, we judge the church in such times as being spiritually dead. But it is hard for any of us to step outside our culture. Does the church pray for revival today because it craves success? Does God not want revival that we need to implore Him to send it? Or do we need to attend to our spiritual lives? Certainly, we need to be open to the truth, for Jesus will set us free from the chains of deception.

Galatians 4:1-11

Let us seek truth in Galatians Chapter 4.

Galatians 4:1-2

> [1] My point is this: heirs, as long as they are minors, are no better than slaves, though they are the owners of all the property; [2] but they remain under guardians and trustees until the date set by the father.

Paul used several pictures in this section to make his point. First, he described a minor waiting to come of age. Minors can't have full use of the inheritance until they attain the date set by their fathers. Under Roman law, a father would write in his will that if he dies before his son attains the age of 25, the estate is to be managed by others. We cannot take this example too far, because God does not die.

Galatians 4:3

> So with us; while we were minors, we were enslaved to the elemental spirits of the world.

In Greek and Roman culture, earth, water, air and fire were elemental spirits. They worshipped the sun, moon, planets and the stars as gods. If these created things displayed any god-like quality at all, it was demonic. People felt compelled to attend pagan temples to worship and try to please the demands of these gods. Jesus released the Galatians from slavery to this futility. Today, we become slaves to the false principles of the world when we give in to peer group pressure and follow the lifestyle of our postmodern culture.

Galatians 4:4-5

> [4] But when the fullness of time had come, God sent his Son, born of a woman, born under the law, [5] in order to redeem those who were under the law, so that we might receive adoption as children.

Here Paul changed his metaphor from the minor waiting to come of age to a homeless orphan adopted by a family. Notice God takes the initiative to counter our acceptance of the lies of Satan. The Son of God entered His own creation, taking on human form in the person of Jesus. Although Jesus obeyed the law as led by the Spirit, He exasperated the Pharisees, especially when He healed on the sabbath. He told them God gave the law for their benefit and not to enslave people; and besides, the Son of Man had authority over the sabbath. The law wasn't the problem; Jesus redeemed them from the Pharisaical interpretation of the law.

Galatians 4:6-7

> [6] And because you are children, God has sent the Spirit of his Son into our hearts, crying, "Abba! Father!" [7] So you

> are no longer a slave but a child, and if a child then also an heir, through God.

In this passage, Paul used the images of children and slavery to say as we are no longer slaves but adopted children, we are heirs to the father's estate.

It is interesting that the first Christians kept the Aramaic word used by Jesus and His disciples, "*Abba*", when they wrote in the Greek language, which was the language in general use at the time. *Abba* was what an Aramaic speaking child, such as Jesus, would call His father when he was small. Paul joined *Abba* with the Greek word for "Father". It is though Scripture is emphasising for us the very personal relationship we have with God. God wants us to relate to Him as a father, and not as a remote king, or as a judge ruling over us, or a warrior seeking vengeance. To the contrary, God cares for us, He loves us, and we can come to Him with child-like faith.

The image of the Christian as a child of God, and therefore an heir, might lead us to wonder what we would inherit from God. God desires to bless His children. This isn't support for prosperity theology. Short-lived gifts don't measure up to God's standard of blessing. We are privileged and exalted into a personal, eternal relationship with Almighty God.

Galatians 4:8

> Formerly, when you did not know God, you were enslaved to beings that by nature are not gods.

Legalism enslaves God's children into a long, hard struggle to please God. But God wants to deliver His people from slavery. Galatians 4:8 makes clear that the elemental spirits Paul mentioned in verse 3 are the many gods worshipped in the ancient world. Of course, they were not actual gods. They were lifeless idols and demonic spirits intent on deceiving people.

The gods of the pagans had no concern for humanity. Once, I worked with a Muslim who saw God as so exalted and transcendent that a personal relationship with Him was impossible. Obeying the Koran's rules is the only relationship Muslims can have with God. This is a relationship of legalism. The God of Islam does approve of everyone, only well-behaved Muslims, let alone love anyone. My friend also believed in fate, “what will be, will be”. Everything that happens is Allah's will. There can be no good news in Islam. It is enslavement to a lie.

Galatians 4:9

> Now, however, that you have come to know God, or rather to be known by God, how can you turn back again to the weak and beggarly elemental spirits? How can you want to be enslaved to them again?

Notice we do not save ourselves by the act of placing our faith in Jesus, but God saves us to reward Christ with the lives of those He died to save. Jesus remains faithful in this friendship with us imperfect, sinful human beings. We can, however, do the unthinkable and turn from Christ and again become enslaved to the elemental spirits by believing their lies.

Religion and legalism give rules to live by to prove your worth to God. We cannot win God’s approval because of something special in ourselves (even a spiritual gift). The church falls into legalism when it lauds itself above others, or claims special times or places have spiritual importance. Legalism in Christianity is no different from that in Islam, Hinduism, and Buddhism.

A system of divine rewards and punishment comes from the bankrupt principles of the world mentioned in verse 9. But how could anyone released from slavery to these lies turn away

from a gracious, fatherly God? Satan is behind this. He peddles doubts about the goodness of God.

Galatians 4:10-11

> [10] You are observing special days, and months, and seasons, and years. [11] I am afraid that my work for you may have been wasted.

Paul criticised both pagan and Jewish rituals alike. Pagan religions honoured the emperor and the heavenly lights, the sun, moon, stars and planets, as gods. Special days included the Jewish Sabbath days and feast days. Special months celebrated the pagan new moon events, which Isaiah 1:14 said the Lord hated. The Feasts of Tabernacles and Passover are examples of seasons. The year of Jubilee, when Jews were supposed to release their slaves, is an example of a special year that occurred every 50 years.

Now some of these festivals come from the Jewish religious calendar, which Paul himself followed, but he was a Jew and did so for cultural reasons, like Australians celebrate Christmas and Easter holidays whether or not they are Christians. But for Gentile Christians to obey Jewish laws to please God would be wrong. When Christians go into pagan temples, or Jewish synagogues, or Muslim mosques, any participation in their rituals would be a denial of their own faith. We cannot deny Jesus to respect the beliefs of other religions.

When Paul said in verse 11, “I am afraid that my work for you may have been wasted”, this is a disputed English translation. According to F. F. Bruce, Paul wrote in first century Greek, “I am afraid for you.” Afraid, because they were falling into legalism. If the Galatians lost their faith in Christ, Paul’s proclamation of the gospel to them was in vain. His concern was for the Galatians and not the success of his ministry.

Obedience to the law has a terrible consequence. It is turning away from Christ and His grace. Christians today sometimes think they should follow the law and insist others observe the law as they interpret it. Must we attend church on a Sunday, or on the Jewish Sabbath, Saturday? We regard some sins as worse than others. The church overlooks sins such as pride and gossip and a lack of love for others. But if we exclude from the church people who don't measure up to our standards, we are being legalistic, placing law before people, and we risk falling from grace. Paul regarded the Galatians as brothers and sisters in Christ. He had no desire to exclude them from the church. It was error that he wanted excluded.

Freedom in Christ

Let's reiterate:

1) **Satan is a liar** (John 8:44) and demons, evil spirits and our own sinful nature are active participants with him.

2) **Truth sets us free from lies** about God and the right use of the law (John 8:32).

3) **Jesus is the truth** (John 14:6), not an abstract concept, but a person. We can believe in this truth.

God doesn't give us a list of rules because He has strict requirements for His creatures. He gave us the law because of our sins. He knows we need help. We avoid sin for the same reason we don't play on the highway. It's dangerous. Getting run over hurts and maims. Legalism is the misuse of God's law. God does not insist His children work for His approval. They need to be alert to the enemy's lies. It helps us resist the temptations of the enemy if we understand God is good, and He wants us to be free from sin. When someone offends us, we

are free from the temptation to retaliate. We are free as a bird to fly above unforgiveness and selfishness.

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8. Know Who You Are

Galatians 4:12-20

Knowing who we are is vital information. How else can we introduce ourselves? But self-identification is more than choosing the right name tag. It protects us from the devil's attacks. We saw this in the first part of Galatians Chapter 4. The devil uses three deceptions: (1) about God, (2) regarding ourselves, and (3) concerning our relationships. Now we turn to the second deception about who we are.

Satan twists religion against us and applies the weapons of guilt and fear of failure. The devil wants to focus our attention on our sin. God urges us to keep our eyes fixed on His Son.

Our enemy says we are worthless, miserable sinners, but nonetheless we are doing well compared to others. Either way, he draws our attention to our own performance. But who are we that God would accept us or reject us based on our performance? Let's go back to Genesis.

The Image of God

Genesis 1:27

> So God created humankind in his image, in the image of God he created them; male and female he created them.

What does it mean to be created in "the image of God"? Some say the term refers to a human capacity, such as the ability to reason. Our reasoning power separates us from the animals. But there is a problem with this interpretation. Intellectually impaired people are no less in God's image. People with autism or Down Syndrome or same-sex attraction are fully human. Humanity's fall into sin even damaged the identity given in the second part of verse 27, being created male and female. So, what could God's image mean if God considers people in such minorities to share His image? Look at the verse immediately before 27.

Genesis 1:26

> Then God said, "Let us make humankind in our image, according to our likeness; and **let them have dominion** over the fish of the sea, and over the birds of the air, and over the cattle, and over all the wild animals of the earth, and over every creeping thing that creeps upon the earth."

From this verse, some theologians deduce that the image of God refers to our God-given task of ruling over creation. Thus, humans have things to do to represent God in creation. In the New Testament, Paul says Christians represent God as ambassadors of the gospel. Now, not everyone is a Christian and an emissary for God, but we all bear God's image. Having a God-given task to fulfil doesn't define who we are. It is just about what we do. Let's look for something else.

Genesis 2:18

> Then the LORD God said, "It is not good that the man should be alone; I will make him a helper as his partner."

Other scholars suggest God made people in His image so we can form relationships. God is three persons in one essence, which means relationships exist within the Godhead. Might not we discover who we are in our relationships? Unfortunately, sin has damaged our relationships with God and with other people. In sin, we see ourselves as self-governing individuals relating to others who are also autonomous. God, out of His love, wants to reconcile humanity. God considers us to be in His image despite our sin disrupted relationships. Let's keep looking.

Genesis 5:3

> When Adam had lived one hundred thirty years, he became the father of a son in his likeness, according to his image, and named him Seth.

Adam and Eve's son, Seth, was in Adam's image. This is similar to Adam being made in God's image. Seth would have had a family resemblance to Adam. But there was something more significant: the father son relationship.

Being in God's image is humanity's redeeming feature, not in the sense of a capacity (our rationality), a task (having dominion over creation), or a characteristic (being sociable). The "made in the image of God" metaphor corresponds to being God's children, another metaphor. We are God's covenant family. The word "covenant" itself is a metaphor for a firm commitment, like a marriage covenant. The term "covenant relationship" never occurs in Scripture because covenant is a metaphor for a relationship. In the Bible, God states His covenant in the words, "I will be their God and they

shall be my people." God from the beginning created humanity to be His people and He their God.

In the Genesis story of the fall into sin and death, God denied Adam and Eve access to the tree of life after they sinned. This wasn't because God was angry and wanted to punish them. He did not want to immortalise them in sin. On the contrary, God restores His children through faith, and this is not as autonomous individuals, but as a family. As Lesslie Newbigin pointed out, there is no private salvation that does not involve us with one another (The Gospel in a Pluralist Society, p. 82). It wasn't until the coming of Christ that humanity discovered how God would achieve atonement through faith in Christ, for He is the Son of God and the exact image of God who embraces us into God's family.

The covenant of God structures the Bible from its beginning to its ending. At the end of the last book of the Bible, Revelations, John writes.

Revelation 21:3

> And I heard a loud voice from the throne saying, "See, the home of God is among mortals. He will dwell with them; they will be his peoples, and God himself will be with them;

This is what God intends for us. The devil tries to deceive us about who we are. If we know we have a new identity as God's beloved children and that God commits to being our God, we can be certain He will save us. The devil denies this and tries to ensnare us into trying to free ourselves from sin. It's impossible, and Satan knows it. He enjoys watching humanity wallowing in the mud.

Galatians 4:12-20

Now back to Galatians. In Chapter 4, vs 12, Paul became more personal with the Galatians.

Galatians 4:12

> Friends, I beg you, become as I am, for I also have become as you are. You have done me no wrong.

Paul said in verse 12, "become as I am." We find that difficult. Aren't we all sinful? Wasn't Paul sinful? Yes, he was. So how can he want anyone to become like him? Well, he doesn't mean that he wants them to be the same as him in all respects. Paul was no longer subject to the law, like the Gentiles who were never under the law. But, he was free from Satan's deception. Paul knew he was a child of God, and he wanted the Galatians to know who they were, too.

Some translate verse 12 to say "put yourself in my place, as I have with you". Paul considered the difference between Jews and Gentiles to be of no importance to God. So Paul lived the same as the Gentiles to win the Gentiles. The Gentiles of Galatia did nothing wrong to him. In fact, under the circumstances, they were very gracious to him.

Galatians 4:13-14

> [13] You know that it was because of a physical infirmity that I first announced the gospel to you; [14] though my condition put you to the test, you did not scorn or despise me, but welcomed me as an angel of God, as Christ Jesus.

This is the only mention of Paul's physical infirmity, so we do not know what it was. Obviously, the Galatians remembered, and Paul didn't need to elaborate. Possibly, Paul fell sick in Galatia. Some conjecture that he caught malaria,

which affects the eyesight. Alternatively, his infirmity may have been caused by physical persecution against him. Paul said he was stoned and beaten many times (2 Cor 11:25).

Why does Paul mention the Galatians didn't scorn him? People blamed demons for causing many sicknesses and being demonised was a reason to dislike a person. Perhaps the authorities persecuted him, and the Galatians, impressed by Paul's faithfulness to his message, believed his message. For whatever reason, they welcomed Paul as though he were Christ himself when he brought them the gospel of Christ. But something had changed in Galatia since Paul's first missionary journey.

Galatians 4:15-16

> [15] What has become of the goodwill you felt? For I testify that, had it been possible, you would have torn out your eyes and given them to me. [16] Have I now become your enemy by telling you the truth?

The Galatians would have torn out their eyes and given them to Paul if he needed them. They would have given him the shirt off their backs is how we would put it today. Or perhaps his physical infirmity was eyesight related.

Paul did not fault their welcome of him, but why do they no longer accept his apostolic teaching? He had brought the gospel to them. Christians today see themselves as bearing witness to the gospel for their communities. Do we relate to one another as brothers and sisters, as co-workers for Christ? We love one another, not because God commanded it, which he did, or because of a duty to love others (from which we benefit). The reason God commands us to love one another is because, in so doing, we live in righteousness as intended, in holiness as God is holy. Being created in the image of God

entails living as children of God. We, like the Galatian Christians, are free. So, why live as slaves?

Galatians 4:17-18

> [17] They make much of you, but for no good purpose; they want to exclude you, so that you may make much of them. [18] It is good to be made much of for a good purpose at all times, and not only when I am present with you.

The false believers used flattery to win over the Galatians. They told them they would please God by following the law. The Judaisers assured them this was their responsibility. Such obedience gave them control of their relationship with God. The Galatians needn't rely on God's mercy, but trust in their own efforts. On the surface, this reasoning makes sense to us who want to be autonomous. We don't like others dominating us. We want to be in control of our relationships and be free. The false believers peddled a package of moral codes, rituals, and doctrines which made people feel independent, but in fact, they were enslaved by them. This ideology enslaved the Judaisers, too, and they urged others to submit to the law in the belief that God would be pleased with them.

Paul was furious with the Galatians for not relying on God but turning to their own devices. He warned them that the false believers didn't have their best interests at heart. The Judaisers thought themselves superior to the Gentiles because they were born Jews.

Paul affirmed that encouragement is a good thing if done with right motives, but otherwise, it is just flattery aimed to deceive and benefit the speaker. It was good for the Galatians to encourage one another and not leave it all up to Paul. A church shouldn't leave the ministry of encouragement entirely to the pastor. Everyone in a congregation should care for the others. It was painful for Paul to contemplate this situation.

Galatians 4:19-20

> [19] My little children, for whom I am again in the pain of childbirth until Christ is formed in you, [20] I wish I were present with you now and could change my tone, for I am perplexed about you.

Paul said he was suffering birth pains for the Galatians because what is at stake is a life-or-death issue. He was amazed that the Galatians had casually set aside their adoption into God's family. Why would anyone who knows the truth entertain lies? They had known God and their place in His family. It's like when you get a nuisance phone call from the Telstra technical department when you are not even with that company, we just hang up. Someone is trying to trick us into giving them money. Why had the Galatians bought such an obvious lie?

Paul had seen the Galatians born again when they came to faith in Christ. Then he felt the pain of seeing the Galatians fall away from grace. It perplexed him how they could desert such a great Saviour. This was very personal for Paul. We trust in the person of Jesus for salvation. We are not freer and more in control because we have something to offer God.

God comes to us in the person of His Spirit, who is poured out on His children: or as Paul put it in verse 19, "Christ formed in you". Receiving Christ's Spirit into our lives changes us so that we treasure every word of Jesus' teaching. We are children of God because of what God has done for us. We do the works of faith because Christ's spirit is reaching out to love others through us.

Who are You?

1. You have a new ID. Do you know who you are? Those who settle for the delusion of independence risk missing

friendship with God. The gospel does not only announce our future destination. God cares for our present situation. He takes our individuality and makes it shine *in Christ*, but not apart from Him. Jesus wants you as a friend. God has a destiny of purpose and fulfilment for you. You are a person loved by God, which is the person God destined you to be.

2. You are a child of God. The Father couldn't possibly love you any more than He does right now. When God said that to me, I wondered, "Is that biblical?" John 3:16 came immediately to mind. "God so loved the world that he gave His only son so that everyone who believes in him may not perish but may have eternal life." God couldn't possibly love you any more than that. He gave His only Son. Every one of us is God's favourite? There is only one of you. You are one of a kind. You are God's favourite you.

3. You have nothing to prove. Don't confuse God having favourites with favouritism (being unfair to those not favoured). We don't compete against each other to win God's favour. John, in his Gospel, referred to himself as the disciple who Jesus loved (John 13:23; 21:20). We might suspect John bragged he was "Jesus' special friend" as if Jesus loved John more than the others. But no, Jesus treats everyone as a special friend. Everyone is important to Him. You are unique. Jesus greatly values you. Each of us can say we are a beloved disciple of Jesus.

4. Draw near to God. James said, "Draw near to God, and he will draw near to you" (Jas 4:8a). This is equivalent to saying you're as close to God as you want to be. God is not withholding your destiny from you. That is a lie of the devil. This world may be unkind to you, but God is never unkind to His children. God is good, and He is good towards you. Let no one cast doubt on your identity in Christ. You can reply with the Apostle John, "I am a disciple Jesus loves." It is true, and

He will stay with you always. Draw near to Him in prayer and in serving others on His behalf.

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9. A Story of Two Mothers

Galatians 4:21-5:1

Then Paul turned to a story of two mothers. In Galatians Chapter 4, Paul uncovered three lies of the devil: (1) about God, telling us God is not perfectly good, (2) our identity in Christ, telling us we are not beloved children of God and (3) regarding our inter-personal relationships, which is the subject of this section.

The Christians in Galatia had placed their faith in God, trusting God to save them. But they were still sinners. They didn't need Satan to point it out, but I'm sure he did, anyway. So, what did they do? They tried to clean themselves up by following their own spiritual fitness program.

What's wrong with that? If they could clean up their own lives, they wouldn't need a saviour. Neither would we, not before we came to faith, nor afterwards either. God never intended His children to earn a place in His family. The

Galatians thought that by obeying the laws of Moses, God would be pleased with them. But God delights in His Son and His Son's friends. A child does not need to earn his or her parent's love.

So, Paul asked another question in Galatians 4:21.

Galatians 4:21

> Tell me, you who desire to be subject to the law, will you not listen to the law?

Paul said in passing, "you who desire to be subject to the law". No one in their right mind wants to be subject to the law. Why did the false believers try to compel the Galatians to obey the law? They said that we need to have control of our relationship with God. So, if we do right, God will approve of us.

Paul wondered whether the Galatians had really understood Moses' teachings. If you have ears to hear (as Jesus used to say), you would know God intended the Ten Commandments to be received by faith. Instead of regarding the law as a tool to win God's approval, see it as a gift from God, to show His people how to avoid the sin that harms and defiles them.

Paul then told the story of the two mothers.

Galatians 4:22-23

> [22] For it is written that Abraham had two sons, one by a slave woman and the other by a free woman. [23] One, the child of the slave, was born according to the flesh; the other, the child of the free woman, was born through the promise.

When Paul said, "it is written" he is referring to Genesis Chapters 16 & 21. Abraham lived some 2,000 years before Christ. God had promised Abram and Sarai, as they were then

named, that they would have a son. But Sarai was past the age of childbearing. Sarai and Abram became impatient and took matters into their own hands. Sarai gave her young maid, Hagar, to Abram to conceive a child through her. Or as Eugene Peterson put it, Abraham and Sarah could not conceive, so they conceived a plan to help God out.

You have heard it said that God helps those who help themselves, but Isaiah 64:4 says God helps those who wait for Him. But Abram became impatient.

And so, Abram, aged 86 years, became a father to Ishmael (Gen 16:16). Commit this figure to memory. We will do some arithmetic soon. Ishmael is the child Paul described as being born according to the flesh.

God changed Abram's name to Abraham at age 99 years and told him he would become the father of a multitude of nations. God also changed his wife Sarai's name to Sarah, meaning princess or a person of high rank, for she would be the matriarch of the Jewish nation. The following year (Abraham, then aged 100), Isaac was born. Paul explained that Isaac was born through the promise. Now we come to the arithmetic. Calculate the age difference between Ishmael and Isaac. Answer: 14 years. You can imagine how the teenager Ishmael felt about the birth of Isaac.

Why did Paul raise this story? He explained as follows.

Galatians 4:24

> Now this is an allegory: these women are two covenants. One woman, in fact, is Hagar, from Mount Sinai, bearing children for slavery.

Paul said he was using this Old Testament story as an allegory. What is an allegory?

An allegory is similar to both a fable and a parable. They are all stories with a hidden meaning. A fable personifies animals, such as the fable of the hair and the tortoise, to present the moral, “slow and steady wins the race”. A parable is a story with people instead of animals and teaches spiritual values. Jesus used the parable of the Good Samaritan to answer the question: who is my neighbour? The message behind the story was that anyone you meet who needs help is your neighbour.

An allegory is usually longer and more elaborate, such as Jesus’ parable of the sower with the seed falling on four different soil types, or John Bunyan’s Pilgrim’s Progress, or Jonathan Swift’s Gulliver’s Travels. In Galatians, Paul used an allegory as a teaching aid. The original story in Genesis is not an allegory. It’s history. Paul’s allegory doesn’t have to match every detail of the Genesis story. The allegory stands by itself.

For instance, Hagar did not come from Mount Sinai. From the photo, you can see Mount Sinai is a desolate place. It had no inhabitants. Besides, we are told in Genesis 16:1 that Hagar came from Egypt. Paul used Hagar and Mount Sinai to represent the law because the 10 commandments were given to

Moses on Mount Sinai. So, let's set up the following table to show the parts of the allegory.

Paul continued his allegory.

Galatians 4:25

> Now Hagar is Mount Sinai in Arabia and corresponds to the present Jerusalem, for she is in slavery with her children.

It would have infuriated the Jews for Paul to say that Hagar corresponds to Jerusalem. All of Hagar's children were the property of her owner. Paul considered the Jewish religious leaders in Jerusalem to be enslaved to legalism. They thought they had to obey the law. A legalistic attitude to the law is self-centred. Legalists seek to justify themselves before God. It isn't possible, and God doesn't want anyone to try, anyway.

Our explanatory table gets more details on Hagar's side. Hagar and Jerusalem were both enslaved under the law. Paul then turned to the other side of his story.

Galatians 4:26

> But the other woman corresponds to the Jerusalem above; she is free, and she is our mother.

Paul didn't name the free woman. But we know the other woman was Sarah, Abraham's wife. She was a free woman and therefore her children were also free. Paul said in this respect she corresponds to the Jerusalem above, the heavenly Jerusalem. She is free. In Paul's allegory, Christians are descendants of Sarah. We are free from having to justify ourselves before God by obedience to the law.

We, like Isaac, are children of the promise, on the Sarah side of our table. Sarah corresponds to the Jerusalem above, which means she symbolises the freedom we have in God's kingdom. In God's place, the heavenly Jerusalem, also called the Kingdom of God, we are at home. We don't have to justify being at home. It's where we belong.

Paul then took an explanatory detour from his allegory.

Galatians 4:27

> For it is written, "Rejoice, you childless one, you who bear no children, burst into song and shout, you who endure no birth pangs; for the children of the desolate woman are more numerous than the children of the one who is married."

This verse is not part of the Sarah and Hagar allegory. Paul was quoting Isaiah 54:1. In 597 BC, the Babylonians conquered Israel and took them captive. Isaiah prophesied that God's people would return to the promised land after 70 years of exile in Babylon. Isaiah also predicted the years following Israel's return from exile would be better than those before their exile. Paul quoted this prophecy to say the Jerusalem

above will surpass the earthly Jerusalem. The church under the new covenant receives a greater blessing than Israel under the old. The distinction being that Christians receive the Holy Spirit and join God's family of millions of people.

Paul quoted the Isaiah 54:1 promise to the barren woman to have children since it brought to his mind God's concern for the faithful. Isaac was the child of promise.

There is one similarity between Hagar and Sarah: the miraculous intervention of God. Hagar, too, through her son, was blessed to be the mother of the Ishmaelites who gave birth to many Arabic tribes. However, the free woman's offspring would outnumber those of the slave. Indeed, Christianity has become a large world religion where Gentile Christians far outnumber both Arabic people and Jewish Christians combined. Where did that leave the churches of Galatia?

Galatians 4:28-29

> [28] Now you, my friends, are children of the promise, like Isaac. [29] But just as at that time the child who was born according to the flesh persecuted the child who was born according to the Spirit, so it is now also.

Here Paul returned to the Hagar and Sarah story, saying Christians are like Isaac in having a supernatural birth and being persecuted by unbelievers. Paul was referring to the story in Genesis 21 where Ishmael kept mocking Isaac. If you do the arithmetic, at this stage the ages of the two boys were 17 and three. Paul allegorised Ishmael's persecution of Isaac to correspond with two ways of relating to God. And both are incompatible with each other.

Conflict can arise between brothers and sisters in the Lord who are in the same church, so conflict between half-brothers is not surprising. As Jesus pointed out, the Jews killed the prophets. The Pharisees and other religious leaders opposed Jesus and had the Romans execute Him. Some of the biggest criticism of believers comes from within the church. Christians need to remember whose side they are on.

Galatians 4:30-31

> 30 But what does the scripture say? "Drive out the slave and her child; for the child of the slave will not share the inheritance with the child of the free woman." 31 So then, friends, we are children, not of the slave but of the free woman.

So, Paul implied the Galatians should cast out the false teachers, whose human-centred religion was incompatible with faith in God. The Scripture Paul quoted is Genesis 21:10.

Genesis 21:10

> So she said to Abraham, “Cast out this slave woman with her son; for the son of this slave woman shall not inherit along with my son Isaac.”

The Jews interpreted this as God’s rejection of the Gentiles. Paul boldly turns it around on them and applied it to exclude unbelieving Jews from Christianity. This would have angered the Judaisers, but Paul wanted to shame them into repentance. God does not approve anyone on the basis of ancestry, but looks for a heart of faith. The true sons of Abraham are those born of the Spirit.

The slave woman’s children represent the result of works of the flesh, of seeking to relate to God through works of law. Hence, they don’t inherit the promise. They prefer to live by their own efforts.

Verse 31 concludes Paul’s allegory. Note that he includes himself as a child of God by changing the pronoun from “you”, that he used previously in vs 28, to “we”. The children of God are descendants of the free woman. For those of us who live in a western individualist culture, it is a challenge for us to give priority to our membership of God’s family.

A Story of Two Mothers

Hagar, the slave woman	Sarah, the free woman
A covenant of works	The Covenant of God
Mt Sinai, the Law	Children of the Promise
The present Jerusalem	The heavenly Jerusalem
Ishmael, a natural birth	Isaac, a supernatural birth
Slavery to the law.	Christians are free

The above table completes the two lists of Paul's allegory that describes the spiritual states of the Judaisers and the Christians. By using the stories of two mothers, two covenants, and so on, Paul tries to awaken the Galatians to their plight in making themselves subject to the law. The allegory contrasts deception and truth.

Paul's two covenants are not the Old Covenant and the New Covenant. The Old and New Covenants are just different phases of the one Covenant of God. According to Jeremiah 31:33, the Old and New Covenants differ in the coming of the Holy Spirit. The covenant on the left is Satan's lie, a covenant of works. The covenant should not be seen as a contract whereby Christians have some claim on God. It is all by grace. A covenant is used as a metaphor for a steadfast relationship. God never intended for us to earn our way into God's heart. The righthand side of the table is God's promise to be our God and to accept people of faith as His children. This is God's covenant of grace, our adoption as children.

Then Paul summed up the result of this teaching.

Galatians 5:1

> For freedom Christ has set us free. Stand firm, therefore, and do not submit again to a yoke of slavery.

Galatians 5:1 forms a transition between everything before this point in his letter and the start of the next section, which we will look at in the next chapter. It is a key verse in the letter to the Galatians, so I will include it twice. Paul called Christians to avoid everything that smacks of legalism and, instead, to rest in Christ's work for them, and live by the Spirit of freedom.

Christians are completely free from trying to justify themselves before God. Non-Christians sometimes say they aren't good enough to attend church. Did we Christians inadvertently give them that idea? The good works of children of God are works of faith freely done because they want to follow in the ways of their loving heavenly father.

The Jews of Paul's day spoke with approval of taking the yoke of the law upon themselves. They saw it as a good thing to do. Jesus told Christians to take His yoke upon them (Matt 11:29-30), because it was easy and light. Paul's thought will go in that direction in the next section.

Truth and Lies

Paul has uncovered the lies of Satan. Faith is the only fitting response to the grace and goodness of God. Both grace and faith are relationship terms. The Covenant that Paul spoke of in his allegory represents a strong relationship. We sometimes hear grace defined as an undeserved favour, the emphasis being on our unworthiness. But if we turn the focus towards God, we see grace as His kindness towards those who depend on Him. In His grace, God is merciful and makes concessions to us. God has a generous spirit and out of His love for humanity and his hatred of evil, He wants us to follow in His ways.

When Paul was in Galatia, he urged the church to continue in the grace of God (Acts 13:43). In his letter to the Galatians, he warned them not to follow the false teachers, or they will miss the blessings of God's grace that flow through a relationship of faith in Christ. Paul implored them to be receptive to God's grace and to share that same grace and love with others.

Our relationships with others can reflect either the Holy Spirit's generosity or the enemy's self-centred spirit. Jesus called us to have faith in God and to love others.

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10. The Only Thing That Counts

Galatians 5:1-15

We looked at Paul's allegory of Sarah and Hagar to represent Christian freedom versus slavery to legalism. Now I have an analogy: using life under the sea to illustrate how God communicates with human beings using the things of this world. If we humans want to communicate with intelligent fish, we can't use any concepts of the world above the waves, not even human language. Your average intelligent fish cannot conceive of existence apart from its watery one. Except for flying fish, they haven't even glimpsed the world above the sea, and flying fish are crazy anyway.

God inspired the Bible. But God had to use stories and languages of this world that existed in the cultures of the time. The Son of God came into the world as Jesus who taught people about the Kingdom of Heaven using parables. As we turn to Galatians Chapter 5, we will seek what God wants to say to us through Paul's writing. Don't forget that Paul lived in the first century in a very different culture to ours. We simply cannot read Galatians as a plain English letter written

yesterday. And we have to ask God what He is saying to us through it.

Just as it would be difficult for us to communicate with an intelligent fish, God has to accommodate His revelations to our capacity to receive it. We have an advantage over those who lived before the coming of Christ because Jesus gave us a clearer understanding of God. Old Testament history, laws and stories can be difficult to understand. Blame the sin of humanity and not God, who is constantly reaching out to us.

Take, for example, the story of the Tower of Babel. The story reads to us as though God limited man's abilities to communicate with one another to prevent them building a tower to heaven. It is as if God wanted to limit man's achievements. Since those days, we've learned a lot about what God is like. God acted to protect us from ourselves. By dividing humanity into many languages and cultural groups, God limited the damage that we inflict on one another. This action helps us understand that God wants to communicate and demonstrate His love for us.

When God gave the Holy Spirit to the church at Pentecost, the disciples spoke in languages, not their own. The Spirit helps humanity overcome the limitations we have in living in God's kingdom while still in this world below.

In Galatians, we find God's Kingdom expressed in terms of this world. Words such as freedom, faith, love and law, and their equivalents in other human languages, have different connotations in God's Kingdom.

So, let's turn to Galatians Chapter 5, where Paul wrote about living in God's Kingdom. We have seen in the earlier chapters that we are not only justified by faith, but we are also called to live by faith. In the first 15 verses of Chapter 5, Paul called the Galatians to live in Christ. Let's start in verse 1.

Galatians 5:1

> For freedom Christ has set us free. Stand firm, therefore, and do not submit again to a yoke of slavery.

"For freedom Christ has set us free" sounds like Paul is going around in circles. So, I did what I always do when confronted with something I can't clearly understand: I used Google.

I translated the phrase into Zulu and because I don't understand Zulu either, I translated it back from Zulu into English, and came up with "Freely Christ has set us free", which is true, our salvation is a gift, but Paul had something more significant to say to the Galatians. Context is everything when trying to interpret a Bible verse. When a phrase was written has a bearing on its interpretation. Paul wrote this in the first century, when slavery was commonplace. If you needed help around the house, you could buy a slave at the local markets. But if you were unable to pay your debts, your debtors could sell you as a slave.

The church had to learn how God's children should relate to one another. The early church misunderstood Exodus Chapter 21, which comes right after the giving of the Ten Commandments, as endorsing slavery because it gives rules for keeping slaves. Paul was telling the Galatians that, as Christians, they are like slaves who have been set free. They knew a person released from slavery would not turn up at his previous master's workplace the next day. For a life of freedom, Christ has set them free.

The yoke refers to a plank of timber used to keep oxen working together when ploughing the fields. The Jews used this as a metaphor to show they had yoked themselves to the law of God. They saw it as a blessing. But Paul said the Jews

yoked themselves to the law to earn favour with God. As such, they were yoked to slavery.

The concept of freedom in the world differs from freedom in God's Kingdom. People think of freedom as a right; that we should be able to conduct our lives as we please. The Jews criticised Paul as teaching that Christians may disobey the laws of Moses and do whatever they want. But being free to do anything you please was not what Paul intended.

Freedom in God's Kingdom is not a license to sin. God gave the law for our benefit. Just as disobedience to the law of gravity can have serious consequences, disobeying God's laws has consequences too. Paul warned Christians against approaching the laws of Moses to justify themselves before God. This is only another form of slavery; slavery to self-righteousness. Our intelligent fish is confined to a watery world, just as we live in a sin-permeated world. God wants us to join Him in breathing new life into this world, not joining in its sin.

Galatians 5:2-3

> [2] Listen! I, Paul, am telling you that if you let yourselves be circumcised, Christ will be of no benefit to you.
> [3] Once again I testify to every man who lets himself be circumcised that he is obliged to obey the entire law.

Circumcision of all male Jews was required under the law of Moses. But that was just the beginning. The Jews had to obey hundreds of laws recorded in the first five books of the Bible. This is why Paul said men who obey the law by letting themselves be circumcised must obey the entire law. How can Christ save you if you want to justify yourself by relying on your own strength to obey the law?

It would be like receiving a dinner invitation because the hosts felt obligated to you for a kindness you gave them. It

would sour the occasion knowing your host hadn't invited you because they wanted your company. They were enduring your presence out of a sense of duty to pay you back. Christians, living by faith in God's Kingdom walk, by the Spirit, not because of a perceived duty to obey the law. We are free from the devil's lie that we can win God's approval by obeying the law. God loves us and wants to save us. He doesn't want us to pay Him back.

Galatians 5:4

> You who want to be justified by the law have cut yourselves off from Christ; you have fallen away from grace.

Does verse 4 imply that you can lose your salvation by failing to understand what God is saying to us? What if you're not such an intelligent fish? Context is all important. Paul was saying we cannot justify ourselves by obeying the laws of Moses. Our performance has no bearing on our salvation. We form relationships through faith. Paul was not saying the Galatians once had grace, and they lost it because they fell for the false believers' teaching. The grace of God is eternal. God does not stop loving us because we go astray. But Paul warned those who try to save themselves through works of the law that they are missing the grace of God towards them through Christ.

God did not give us laws to establish His sovereignty (which was never in doubt), but to help us live in His kingdom of love, the place we belong. God is not insecure in His position as God in spite of the rebellion of humanity and the fallen angels. He does not give laws to restrict human behaviour, but because He loves us. Down here in the underworld, sharks threaten us. If anyone aligns themselves with demons, they side with humanity's mortal enemy. Hence, Paul's condemnation of the false believers. God isn't a threat to

us, He is for us. Salvation is always open to us. The sharks cannot prevent us coming to God, or rather, God coming to us.

God created us with free will, but freedom misused can lead to our destruction. Let's use our freedom to seek the Lord and walk in His ways. This is the life of true freedom.

Galatians 5:5

> For through the Spirit, by faith, we eagerly wait for the hope of righteousness.

In the world beneath, we understand faith differently. Here, a person of faith is thought to possess a substantial amount of positive mental attitude. We compliment people for their faith, as if it was their achievement. In the spiritual realm, faith is a personal commitment, hence the covenant metaphor. We are reconciled with God by faith. The quantity of faith is unimportant, but the Person our faith connects us to is all-important. Great faith connects us to a great God who is never unfaithful.

Verse 5 says we wait for the hope of righteousness. We continue as sinners in this world. The important thing, according to Paul, is being approved by God so we will one day be free from sin. When we die, God will not resurrect our sinful natures, but raise us to righteousness.

Galatians 5:6

> For in Christ Jesus neither circumcision nor uncircumcision counts for anything; the only thing that counts is faith working through love.

In another letter, Paul said something similar about circumcision, but there he said obeying the commandments was everything. Paul wrote in **1 Corinthians 7:19,**

> Circumcision is nothing, and uncircumcision is nothing; but obeying the commandments of God is everything.

The Corinthians were using their freedom as a license to sin. There is an apparent contradiction here between Paul's letters to the Galatians and the Corinthians. To resolve the issue, some Christian scholars say Paul in Corinthians is speaking of the moral law behind the Ten Commandments, while in Galatians, he has the ceremonial law in view. The problem with this explanation is the Jews didn't divide the law of God into those categories. They saw all the laws of God as of equal importance. The Jews attacked Paul for teaching that God doesn't demand we obey the law. Paul replied to this criticism in **Romans 3:31,** saying:

> Do we then overthrow the law by this faith? By no means! On the contrary, we uphold the law.

When we become a Christian and receive the gift of the Holy Spirit, we can say we have the law written on our hearts, as prophesied by Jeremiah recorded in **Jeremiah 31:33.**

> I will put my law within them, and I will write it on their hearts; and I will be their God, and they shall be my people.

This is the New Covenant that God has given us. Of course, we don't go around stealing and murdering, lying and cheating. These are not the ways of God, nor His people. We enter God's kingdom, not by obedience to the laws of the Kingdom, but because we are God's people. We show God's kingdom to the world by the way we treat others. The world chooses not to understand this. The Judaisers didn't understand it or they wouldn't have criticised Paul the way they did. But the church must understand it, or we will fall back into slavery to obeying laws to justify ourselves.

Paul said in Galatians 5, verse 6 that faith works, or operates, through love. By love, Paul did not mean this world's understanding of love as romantic love or affection or sexual love, or even friendship or brotherly love. Nor is love a principle we can use in decision making. Scripture tells us that God is love (1 John 4:8 & 16) and our faith in Him draws His Spirit of love into our lives, which is expressed through works of faith. The resulting behaviour will often look the same in the world's eyes. But when Jesus gave his life for us on the cross, the world did not understand.

Galatians 5:7-9

> [7] You were running well; who prevented you from obeying the truth? [8] Such persuasion does not come from the one who calls you. [9] A little yeast leavens the whole batch of dough.

Paul liked sport. He was fond of using sporting illustrations. As in the modern era, in the first century the Olympic Games were held every four years. Here, Paul portrayed the Galatians as runners performing well until they disqualify themselves by breaking the rules (disobeying the Truth). You can't win a race by cheating.

The false teaching was like yeast because it spread through the church like yeast through dough. The Jews used yeast to symbolise an evil influence. Jesus warned His disciples to beware of the yeast of the Pharisees and Sadducees, meaning their false teaching (Matt 16:6-12).

Galatians 5:10

> I am confident about you in the Lord that you will not think otherwise. But whoever it is that is confusing you will pay the penalty.

Paul's friendship with the Galatians gave him confidence that they would agree with him. But the false teachers would suffer the consequences (pay the penalty) of siding with the enemy. They were self-deceived and sought to win others to their beliefs. Being confused isn't a sin. But those who reject Christ, the source of all life, and confuse God's children are heading to destruction.

Galatians 5:11

> But my friends, why am I still being persecuted if I am still preaching circumcision? In that case the offence of the cross has been removed.

The Jews persecuted Paul for preaching a doctrine they found offensive. It was, and still is, more popular to preach that God approves those who are, for the most part, good people. The offence of the cross mentioned in verse 11 refutes the world's value system, which crucified its Messiah. Under the sea, the sharks rule. The little fish get eaten. But Jesus, who was crucified, dead and buried, still lives.

The false teachers denied the gospel of grace. This is why legalism is deadly and Paul was furious.

Galatians 5:12

> I wish those who unsettle you would castrate themselves!

Paul said he wished the false teachers would not just circumcise themselves, but go further and castrate themselves. In Paul's day, some pagan priests castrated themselves to show their devotion to their god and to win its approval. Paul thought the Galatian heresy was no better than paganism, a false religion.

Galatians 5:13 The Law of the Kingdom

> For you were called to freedom, brothers and sisters; only do not use your freedom as an opportunity for self-indulgence, but through love become slaves to one another.

In verses 13-15, Paul turned his attention to the freedom we have in God's kingdom. Christ frees us to serve one another out of love. It is not a freedom to indulge our own vices. Paul used slavery, which was common in the first century, to illustrate how we should give ourselves to love and serve others. Christians, for many centuries, could see nothing wrong with making slaves out of other human beings. George Whitefield, the famous evangelist of the 18th century, argued to a US state government to let him keep slaves because he cared for their spiritual wellbeing and he needed them to run his estate to support his orphanage. But the ends do not justify the means.

Antinomianism is a term coined by Martin Luther for the belief that Christian freedom makes us free from observing the law, including the moral principles associated with it. Luther denied that his doctrine of justification by faith was antinomian. He thought the church should teach both the law and the gospel. Paul instructed the Galatians to walk by the Spirit who writes the law on their hearts. God did not withdraw from the world leaving us to work out how to interpret and apply the law.

Galatians 5:14-15

> [14] For the whole law is summed up in a single commandment, "You shall love your neighbour as yourself." [15] If, however, you bite and devour one another, take care that you are not consumed by one another.

Jesus summed up the laws of Moses in a single command, “Love your neighbour as yourself.” (Matthew 22:39). This isn’t a principle that we are to live by apart from the Spirit, as proposed by Situation Ethics. Nor is it a substitute law, but a summary statement expressing what God intended through the law. So, if we think we are obeying the Ten Commandments but do not love our neighbour, we deceive ourselves and are not living in the freedom God wants for us.

Remember, God gave the law to assist the citizens of His kingdom while they live in a sinful world. Christians can recommend God’s law to those outside of the kingdom, but should be wary of trying to enforce their interpretation of the written law on those outside God’s kingdom by means of state legislation. Neither Paul nor Jesus led a political campaign to end slavery in the Roman Empire. England only abolished slavery after more than a thousand years of Christian political influence and the 18th century revival awakened Christian values.

Stand Firm Down Under

Christians can stand firm in Christ, free from God’s condemnation of sin, while still in this world of sin. Jesus forgives us. All people are free to believe in Jesus, to trust Him, to talk with Him, to accept His Word as true. God makes salvation as easy as possible.

If we have the promise of God’s approval and His abiding presence with us by His Spirit, then we are free from legalism. The law is a gift from God. John 1:16 & 17 says “from His fullness we have all received, grace upon grace. The law was given through Moses; grace and truth came through Jesus Christ” (NRSV).

God's law is a friend to His people. As the Psalmist wrote, “The law of the LORD is perfect, reviving the soul; the decrees

of the LORD are sure, making wise the simple." Psalm 19:7 (NRSV).

The enemy will try to deceive us, as he did the Galatians. But we are free from trying to justify ourselves before God, and we are free to serve in God's kingdom. Christ has set us free, so we can be wise to the devil's lies.

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11. Walk by the Spirit.

Galatians 5:16-26

In Galatians Chapter 5, Paul wrote about the life of freedom. In verse 1, Paul wrote, “For freedom Christ has set us free” and, like justification, freedom is a gift, of which we are humble recipients. By contrast, the phrase in verse16, “walk by the Spirit,” is a command to action.

Eugene Peterson said that freedom to a Christian is like wind in the sails to a sailor. It’s what makes sailing exciting. But how you use the wind is up to you. The sailor positions the rudder and sails. So, the wind of freedom brings with it responsibility. Paul didn’t intend us to think of freedom and justification by faith as gifts passively received, but as gifts intended to be used.

Galatians 5:16-17 (NRSV)

[16] Live by the Spirit, I say, and do not gratify the desires of the flesh. [17] For what the flesh desires is opposed to the

> Spirit, and what the Spirit desires is opposed to the flesh; for these are opposed to each other, to prevent you from doing what you want.

When Paul said to live by the Spirit, he was not suggesting a possible way forward. Remember, Jesus said He is "the Way, the Truth and the Life. No one comes to the Father except through me." (John 14:6). Christianity permits no alternative. Paul, in Gal 4:6, called the Holy Spirit the Spirit of His Son. In seeking to draw attention to God as being beyond gender, some theologians use the feminine pronouns for the Holy Spirit, since Spirit in Hebrew is a feminine noun. I will stay with the masculine pronouns because I want to draw attention to what Christians mean when they say Christ is in their hearts, they are referring to the Spirit of Christ, the Holy Spirit, the third person of the Trinity.

The reason Paul was angry in writing to the Galatians, was not over a differing opinion. He wasn't quibbling over the interpretation of an obscure Scripture. It concerned the gospel proclaimed by Jesus. The Galatians had wavered from their faith in Christ.

Flesh and Spirit

Now regarding Gal 5:16-26 there is a controversy which stems from the difficulty in knowing what Paul intended by the conflict between flesh and spirit.

Back in the 1960s, John Stott was a leading Christian teacher, and he wrote a commentary on Galatians where he said our sinful nature and our spiritual nature are at war. I quote from John Stott's commentary: "We do not deny that there is such a thing as moral conflict in non-Christian people, but we assert that it is fiercer in Christians because they possess two natures—flesh and Spirit—in irreconcilable

antagonism." (Galatians Bible Speaks Today Commentary page 146).

In the 1980s, I was a member of the John Stott fan club. Many of us believed we have two conflicting natures. There was even a Christian song entitled, "Two of Me Walking in One Man Blues." I had a copy and didn't suspect there might be something wrong with it.

This situation came about because it is difficult to know what Paul meant by "flesh" and "spirit". The Galatians may well have understood what Paul meant because he had taught them in person. But we wonder if Paul was talking about the Holy Spirit or the human spirit, our body of flesh, or our sinful nature? The New Testament Greek language did not distinguish by using a capital for the word "spirit" (*pneuma*). Besides, everything was written in upper case Greek. In English, we can give a capital letter to "God" or to "Spirit", to make it clear we mean the Holy Spirit.

As a result, our English translations of the Bible differ between versions. God's Word version of Galatians Chapter 5 translates "spirit" with a lowercase "s", meaning "human spiritual nature" and it translates "flesh" as "human sinful nature". This would mean that Paul is contrasting our born-again spiritual nature with our sinful nature, the flesh. But, most English Bible translations of this passage use a capital "S" for Spirit to signify the Holy Spirit.

The Greek word *sarx* for flesh used in a neutral sense, means our physical body of flesh, or humanity (as in going the way of all flesh). But it can be used negatively, such as when we put confidence in human strength instead of Christ. The Bible uses flesh in all these ways. Even in the Hebrew language of the Old Testament, we find these alternatives.

Take, for example, **Jeremiah 17:5**.

> [5] Thus says the LORD: Cursed are those who trust in mere mortals and make mere flesh their strength, whose hearts turn away from the LORD.

The Old Testament contrasts relying on human strength with trusting in God's Spirit. In **Zechariah 4:6b** the Lord said:

> [6b] "Not by might nor by power, but by my Spirit," says the LORD Almighty. (NIV)

Christ has two natures, a human nature and a divine nature. But we only have a human nature. Our body, soul, spirit, mind, emotions, will, intellect and so on are aspects of our human nature, not separate natures. I think Paul was saying our human nature sins when we place our trust in our own strength. Thus, the "Spirit" Paul was referring to is the "Holy Spirit" who indwells Christians. The Holy Spirit opposes sinful desires.

I will select a Bible version that spells "Spirit" with a capital "S", translates *sarx* as flesh, and translates the Greek word for "walk" as "walk" instead of "live" (as in the NRSV). Let's read verses 16 and 17 again.

Galatians 5:16-17 (ESV)

> [16] But I say, walk by the Spirit, and you will not gratify the desires of the flesh. [17] For the desires of the flesh are against the Spirit, and the desires of the Spirit are against the flesh, for these are opposed to each other, to keep you from doing the things you want to do.

So, the Spirit in verse 16 refers to the Holy Spirit indwelling the human nature in the same way as our spirit does (the English language doesn't have a concise way of saying that), Paul is contrasting how we conduct ourselves when we follow the leading of the Holy Spirit with how we behave when we

follow our sinful desires. Hence there will be opposition to whatever we want to do, either from the flesh or the Spirit.

Now regarding the word "walk", Paul wrote in other letters to walk worthy of God (1 Thes 2:12) or the Lord (Col 1:10) or to walk worthy of our calling (Eph 4:1), to walk as children of light (Eph 5:8). He taught on the walk of life in 1 Thessalonians 4:1ff. and in Col 2:6. In 2 Thessalonians 3:6 & 11, Paul said to avoid those who are not walking by the Spirit. In 1 Cor 7:17 and Ephesians 4:17, he pointed out that faith results in a changed life. Walking according to the flesh is a thing of the past (Rom. 8:4). Of course, believers still walk in the flesh (2 Cor 10:3), but the flesh is no longer master. The flesh doesn't necessarily get its own way. Christians may choose to walk in newness of life (Rom 6:4). This is a walk by faith (2 Cor 5:7). We follow the Spirit when we deny the desires of the flesh and are attentive to God and love our neighbours.

Paul's primary concern in writing to the Galatians was that they receive the gospel through faith in Christ alone. If we walk by the Spirit, we won't be open to the temptation to think we deserve salvation. It reminds me of those TV commercials that say you deserve to use their product, you've earned it. But we can never earn eternal life by obeying God's law. Next verse:

Galatians 5:18 (ESV)

> [18] But if you are led by the Spirit, you are not subject to the Law.

Here is a twist: Paul contrasts the Spirit with the law of Moses. Previously, he compared the Spirit and the flesh. Why the change? Paul wanted the Galatians to know their seeking to obey the law brought them into slavery to the flesh. They would be trying to earn God's reward by their own work.

If we think we are good people we duplicate the Galatian's attitude. Many reason that, on the whole, they do more good things than evil. They rely on their good works to tip the balance in their favour. Other things replace the circumcision issue today. Things such as helping our mates, donating to a good cause, and paying our fair share. Some think their good works are seen by God. They say, "God is good, so He will reward our efforts and good intentions. God knows how hard it is for us." But Paul would reply, "Your sincere best efforts are worthless works of pride. You are rejecting God's Son, your Saviour."

The Spirit that Paul said will lead us, is the Holy Spirit. When the Holy Spirit, the one who inspired the written law, indwells our lives, If He leads us, we are not subject to the laws written on stone. As Jeremiah predicted of the new covenant, God will write the law on your hearts. Of course, that doesn't make us sinless. In a world of sin, we can't avoid evil. But we are justified to stand before God because of our faith in Christ. Christians are free from the futile efforts of trying to justify ourselves.

The unbelieving world loves to criticise Christians whenever we fail to obey God's law. "Some Christian you are!" they say. "You don't even obey everything taught in the Bible." "You're not religious enough." "Christians are all hypocrites." "God doesn't approve hypocrites." And on and on it goes.

Verse 18 says, "you are not subject to the law". God saves us regardless of our sin because we are friends of His Son. The legalists hate it. If you are led by the Spirit, you have a personal relationship with God, not the Ten Commandments. We use the commandments as a talking point with the Spirit. He inspired them and knows how He intended them to be used.

We make a mess of things if we don't follow the Spirit. That's what verses 19-21 show us. Let's read them.

Galatians 5:19-21 (NRSV)

> [19] Now the works of the flesh are obvious: fornication, impurity, licentiousness, [20] idolatry, sorcery, enmities, strife, jealousy, anger, quarrels, dissensions, factions, [21] envy, drunkenness, carousing, and things like these. I am warning you, as I warned you before: those who do such things will not inherit the kingdom of God.

In several of his letters, Paul pointed out the difference between the works of the flesh and the fruit of the Spirit (see Phil 3:3 and Rom 8:13-14; as well as here in Gal 4:23; 5:18). Trusting in the flesh gives the flesh its power, and produces the works of the flesh (Gal 5:16, 19; Rom 13:14). These are the things God warned us to avoid – the breakdown in human relationships and acts of self-abasement. Imposing law-obedience as self-justification before God, is a work of the flesh (Gal 3:3; 4:8ff.). Living in compliance to the desires of the flesh results in guilt and condemnation. The desires of the Spirit aim to bring freedom and abundant life. In Rom 7 Paul wrote "wretched man that I am" in describing his failure to keep the laws of God in the power of his flesh. Nice and sincere people who try to please God are, in fact, trying to establish their own righteousness, which is, itself, a sin. Believing God will judge using a set of balancing scales ignores "the Way" to life that God has provided.

The list of works of the flesh is not a list of things that keep you away from God. They are the reasons God provided a Saviour. Rather, the list is typical of the failures of the flesh. I say typical because the list is not exhaustive or exclusive. The Spirit can also use the emotion of anger. Didn't Jesus get angry with the money traders in the Temple? A quarrel does not

necessarily mean we are committing sin. The question we should ask is are we being led by the Spirit? So, how do we identify those led by the Spirit?

Galatians 5:22-23 (NRSV)

> [22] By contrast, the fruit of the Spirit is love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, generosity, faithfulness, [23] gentleness, and self-control. There is no law against such things.

Paul said in Romans that everything that does not come from faith is sin (Rom 14:23). The flesh even abuses the fruits of the spirit. Being patient when we should act, being gentle when we should be forthright. The important thing about these two lists is whether the spirit or flesh motivates them.

Christians go astray when they apply laws forbidding wrong actions instead of following the Spirit. Legalism focuses on the act regardless of its motivation. The Pharisees were more concerned over Jesus' breaking the sabbath command forbidding work than the suffering people He healed.

Today, many in the church give priority to Old Testament rules against homosexual practice over concern for homosexuals. Some churches obsess over who it will marry or they place their interpretation of Scripture ahead of church unity, or they think more about the church looking good than giving justice to victims of sexual abuse, or they teach prosperity and health as based on a person's faith and generosity. How can we have revival if the church is following another gospel?

The Spirit inspires things such as love, joy, peace and patience. God's laws do not work against following the Spirit's leading. The fruit of the Spirit gives glory to God. By this means we put to death the flesh and its desires, as it says in the next verse.

Galatians 5:24 (NRSV)

> [24] And those who belong to Christ Jesus have crucified the flesh with its passions and desires.

Christians haven't literally crucified their flesh They have renounced, or died to, the sinful way of life. We aren't passive in this, sitting around waiting for the Holy Spirit to change us. We must apply ourselves. Faith works through love. Walking by the Spirit requires us to be determined and persistent.

Galatians 5:25 (NRSV)

> [25] If we live by the Spirit, let us also be guided by the Spirit.

Verse 25 says to live your life as led by the Spirit. The ESV translation speaks of keeping in step with God's Spirit. It is as if we are walking along, trying to keep in step with God. At every misstep, the devil reminds us we are not good enough. Satan would like us to think being a Christian is incredibly difficult. The devil tells us, we may as well give up. But life is only burdensome if we think our standing with God depends upon our performance. Christ has set us free from all that.

The NASB translation, which does not capitalise "Spirit", for verse 25 reads, "If we live by the spirit, let us also walk by the spirit". Christians are indwelt by the Holy Spirit, who urges us to follow Jesus. So now when we fail and Satan tries to discourage us for not being good enough, we can thank him for pointing out that we are sinful and reminding us to follow the Spirit in God's kingdom where we belong. Satan won't like that. The devil wants us to feel guilty and defeated. James said that the devil would flee from us if we replied that way (James 4:7). Now to the last verse in Galatians Chapter 5.

Galatians 5:26 (NRSV)

> [26] Let us not become conceited, competing against one another, envying one another.

Paul urged the Galatians to live in harmony. When churches compete with one another, they refrain from helping other churches. They might, out of jealousy, even try to hinder other churches. Too often, we see a church having to close, while neighbouring churches do nothing to help.

We are citizens of the same kingdom. We are on the same side. Our God is the only thing we can boast about. Paul repeated the sentiment of this passage in Romans 8:3-4, so let's look at that passage.

Romans 8:3-4 (NRSV)

> [3] For God has done what the law, weakened by the flesh, could not do: by sending his own Son … [4] so that the just requirement of the law might be fulfilled in us, who walk not according to the flesh but according to the Spirit.

God's kingdom and Satan's kingdom have very different values. Jesus taught that to be great in God's Kingdom, we must serve others. When the Jews brought Jesus before Pilate who asked Him if He claimed to be a king, Jesus admitted to Pilate that He is a king, but a king in God's kingdom doesn't impose His rule by force. Jesus does not demand that we submit to Him. Instead, He serves us, saves us, heals us, and sets us free from Satan's lies. Jesus has compassion for us.

God has set us free to enjoy the freedom of living in His kingdom. We have a responsibility in this. But, even the word "responsibility" has a different meaning in God's kingdom. The world sees responsibility as being accountable for our actions with the consequence of reward or penalty. Religion tells us God will judge us on our performance, so we better

shape up. In God's kingdom, responsibility is our attitude towards the people we are serving. We answer to their needs. The works of faith are expressions of the love of God born in us. Our works of faith have no ulterior motive. There is no angle. We don't act out of compulsion. Our good deeds don't get us to heaven. You are children of God and works of love express the character of God's Spirit in us. As sons and daughters of God, we can enjoy a life of freedom. It is not a dirge, hard work, or a drudge trying to please a stern schoolmaster.

No! Let us walk by the Spirit. There is no better way to live. We wouldn't have it any other way.

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12. Sow to the Spirit

Galatians 6:1-10

In Chapter 5, Paul encouraged the Galatians to “walk by the Spirit”, now in Chapter 6 he says to “sow to the Spirit”. Paul was drawing his letter to a close, but he has more to say. This is not a mere summary conclusion or an afterthought. Scrolls of papyrus, reed pens and ink weren’t cheap and the Postal Service was self-serve in those days. So, they wasted no words. I am sure Paul and his secretary had prepared an outline for the letter before Paul started dictating it. Chapter 6 is the climax of a carefully structured letter. Paul was warning the Galatian churches not to be deceived by legalism, and his strategy was to set out clearly the gospel of freedom.

Galatians 6:1-6 Caring for one another

The first part of Chapter 6 encourages looking out for one another (as opposed to looking out for ourselves). Walking by the Spirit is not a purely private matter. It involves other people, and especially the church, because we share a common relationship with Jesus. We cannot obey God’s command to be

holy if we don't follow His Holy Spirit, or if we separate ourselves from His church, or His world. The individualism of the modern western world can easily become self-centred.

In Chapter 6, Paul gives three examples of how we can take responsibility for one another. Here is the first.

1. Forgiveness Galatians 6:1

> My friends, if anyone is detected in a transgression, you who have received the Spirit should restore such a one in a spirit of gentleness. Take care that you yourselves are not tempted.

Eugene Peterson, in his book on Galatians, said that from birth, we strive to be independent and self-sufficient. We struggle to learn how to walk, to get an education, and to make our way in the world. These things are not bad in themselves, but sin gets involved in everything we do.

So, Eugene Peterson said, "The ideal is not independence but interdependence." (Traveling Light, page 175). He pointed out that each person you meet needs your help, every one of them. Each of us has strengths and weaknesses to share with others. That is why the Covid-19 lockdowns were difficult to bear. We were cut off from the relationships and support we need.

Sometimes, we will be the friend who steps in and helps; other times you are the friend who is helped. We experience the life of the Spirit through the mutuality of giving and receiving. By living in a community of grace, we experience the grace of God. When you take a friend along to church or gospel meeting, they have already experienced grace in your actions which helps them understand the message about the grace of God.

2. Help others. Galatians 6:2-3

> [2] Bear one another's burdens, and in this way you will fulfil the law of Christ. [3] For if those who are nothing think they are something, they deceive themselves.

In the Bible, we learn of King David, who was described as a man after God's own heart, but on one occasion he disobeyed God and had an innocent man killed. We read of the Apostle Peter. Jesus said his faith was a rock, yet he denied Christ three times. Jesus told the parable of the prodigal son who squandered his share of the family wealth, but his father welcomed him home. Paul, himself, tried to destroy the church, but Jesus called him to take the gospel to the Gentiles. God doesn't hold grudges. He forgives, and is always ready to be reconciled with His enemies.

When Paul said "in this way you will fulfil the law of Christ", he obviously was not referring to another law to replace the law of Moses. He was talking about the new covenant written on the hearts of believers by the Holy Spirit. It is the life of grace, of generous giving to others and forgiving others, selflessly bearing one another's burdens. The law of Christ isn't for the purpose of punishing wrongdoers, but restoring them. When we sin, we judge, condemn, and punish ourselves. But when we follow the Spirit's leading, we fulfil the law of Christ.

In the Sermon on the Mount, Jesus taught us not to judge others. Jesus blessed the meek, for they inherit the earth. Those who think they are something deceive themselves and inherit nothing. Sin robs people of their inheritance.

3. Being responsible. Galatians 6:4-5

> [4] All must test their own work; then that work, rather than their neighbour's work, will become a cause for pride.
> [5] For all must carry their own loads.

Peterson reminded us “Compassionate, generous, spontaneous mutuality develops when we realise two things:” (page 176).

> 1) There is no **even distribution** of burdens in this life, and
>
> 2) There is no **even distribution** of strengths.

Life distributes blessings and curses haphazardly. Some burdens we take on ourselves, others are dumped on us, or we get them by our own stupidity, or it might simply be misfortune. Likewise, with our strengths, some of us are born with stronger bodies and greater capacity for learning, others have fragile emotions, some are born into good supportive homes in wealthy, stable countries and others are not. There is no equality in this life.

When we understand this, we will stop trying to separate ourselves from others based on whether we are in a strong or weak position. Human prejudices are based on our feelings of superiority over our strengths. We don’t like to admit our weaknesses. But we take credit for things we don't control.

Even Christ, who showed His power by carrying the burdens of the entire world, had His dirty feet washed by Mary, and His too-heavy cross carried by Simon of Cyrene. Everyone is strong and weak in different areas. Interdependence affords opportunity for us to give and receive from one another.

Free to give. Galatians 6:6

> [6] Those who are taught the word must share in all good things with their teacher.

I don’t think Paul, in verse 6, was instructing the Galatians to pay their minister, although the commentaries written by ministers take that view. They could be biased. ☺ Other

passages in scripture say teachers deserve our support, but it was too early in the church's life for paid staff.

In my opinion, Paul was continuing his previous line of thought about bearing one another's burdens and saying that even the teacher of God's Word has needs. Even leaders need to be supported. As we grow into more mature Christians and get to know God's Word more, we don't become more independent of others. Jesus warned us not to accumulate wealth in order to be more self-reliant by building larger storehouses for grain. As Jesus pointed out, we might die tonight. It is better to use our abundance and strengths to help others. We must become self-giving, or else we become slaves to self-indulgence.

The Bible teaches us to share the good things we have with others. Our response of sharing with our teachers, is our way of sharing with Christ, our ultimate teacher, whose law, or ways, Paul mentioned in verse 2. Hebrews 8 quoting the prophet Jeremiah said that when the Holy Spirit comes, He will write the Lord's teachings on our hearts, and generosity is one of those teachings that Paul listed in the fruit of the Spirit. The Spirit sets us free from selfishness so that we are happy to be generous, to our teachers, and to everyone. Now, speaking about fruit, Paul continued by discussing planting and harvesting.

Planting and harvesting Galatians 6:7-8

> [7] Do not be deceived; God is not mocked, for you reap whatever you sow. [8] If you sow to your own flesh, you will reap corruption from the flesh; but if you sow to the Spirit, you will reap eternal life from the Spirit.

Paul introduced an agricultural metaphor of planting and harvesting. It reminds me of Jesus' parable of the sower, but the symbolism is different. The seed in Jesus' parable was the word of God, and the four different soils represented the four different responses to it. In the Galatian's metaphor, the soil represents either our sin or the Spirit. The seed corresponds to our actions that either shrivel up and die or grow into eternal life. This is an instance where you cannot use one scripture to interpret another scripture. The context is different.

From Acts 13:36-37, we learn that when Paul was in Pisidian Antioch (in Galatia), he taught that when King David died, his body rotted in the grave, but Jesus' body did not experience corruption because God raised Him from the dead. So, the Galatians would have remembered this part of Paul's teaching.

The world might not see the harvest but, have no illusions, you can't mock God. If we plant in the soil of the Spirit, believing in God as expressed through deeds of love, we will harvest eternal life. Now Jesus made it clear what He meant by eternal life.

John 17:3

> And this is eternal life, that they may know you, the only true God, and Jesus Christ whom you have sent.

Eternal life is a relationship with God. If you are friends with the Son, God will not let you perish, you are adopted as a child in His everlasting family. Eternal life is what God wants for humanity, both as individuals and as a race. Christians follow what Christ taught them to do. In loving others, they love Christ. This brings to mind when Jesus said, "Whoever welcomes you, welcomes me" (Matt 10:40).

Galatians 6:9

> [9] So let us not grow weary in doing what is right, for we will reap at harvest time, if we do not give up.

Sooner or later, we will reap the consequences of our beliefs and actions. Our flesh gives rise to such things as self-righteousness, being critical of others, gossiping, and envy. But everyone's flesh ends up decomposing in the grave. In sowing to our own flesh, we push others aside as we pursue our self-interest. The flesh doesn't care about anyone else. It wants them only as an admiring audience. We try to hide our selfishness by relabelling it as independence or self-sufficiency.

On the other hand, sowing to the Spirit produces a life of mutuality. Every act of kindness is evidence of our eternal life. Isn't that what we want? Of course, non-believers can be kind too, but in their case, it is not evidence of eternal life. They might see it as their duty or as a reason for others to admire

them. The Spirit brings us into a relationship with God and demolishes the walls of separation between people. Citizenship in God's kingdom brings with it grace, generosity, love for others, forgiveness, healing and compassion. Sometimes, work in God's kingdom can be tiresome, the harvest may not come, and many die without seeing the fruit of their labours (see Hebrews 11:13).

Life's struggles tempt us to give up or to look after ourselves to the neglect of others. Walking by the Spirit can be difficult. It can be embarrassing or a source of persecution or be inconvenient. We find it easier to give to the needy on the other side of the world than the needy in our own neighbourhood. Eugene Peterson wrote that giving to missions should be "an extension of what we do at home, not an exemption from it", which brings us to the next verse.

Galatians 6:10

> [10] So then, whenever we have an opportunity, let us work for the good of all, and especially for those of the family of faith.

"Work for the good of all" implies not excluding anyone over such things as ethnicity, gender, church denomination, and sexual orientation. We should not forget those we meet often, the family of faith. It is easier to do good for members of your own church. So, Paul advised to start with them. Loving our enemies is more of a challenge.

But even though we are sinful, the presence of God's Holy Spirit with us makes us holy, separated for God's use. The new commandment that Jesus gave us, the one that Jesus said summarised the whole law and the prophets, is to love one another. John said that God is love. The second person of the Trinity, the Holy Spirit, indwells us and imparts God's love to others through us.

If we look at each of the Ten Commandments, we find they affirm Jesus' love commandment. Even the first two commandments, have no other gods and make no idols, taught Israel to care for others through the example of their lives. We mislead others if we concoct idols for worship. We don't live in isolation. Today, people insist they should be free to do whatever they wish, as long as it doesn't harm anyone else. But this idea isn't biblical teaching.

The Apostle John wrote in 1 John 3:4 that sin is disobedience to God, or "lawlessness" in the NIV translation. But he said in the next verse that Christ came to take away our sins. John, in chapter 15 of his gospel, recorded that Jesus said He gives His life for His friends and that we are His friends if we obey His commandment to love one another. The word "commandment" has a different connotation when used in God's Kingdom between friends. Jesus' friends wanted to know what they could do to live as His friends. Friendship works both ways. Obeying Jesus' love commandment is not a burden or imposition, but how friends of Jesus live to be like Him.

Reap the Harvest: Eternal Life

Salvation is not only free, it results in a life of freedom. John wrote in John 5:29 that God will judge the dead according to whether or not they have done good. As we saw in the earlier chapters of Galatians, God does not save Christians because of their good works, but salvation frees us to serve others. Faith impels Christians to do works of love.

What does God want from us? Is there anything God is lacking? Does He need people to love and worship Him? Couldn't God get by without humanity?

The answers to such questions involve God's character. What is His nature? God is almighty, He lacks for nothing.

Things are not out of control for God. But the Bible does not reveal God as a controlling God. He resists overriding human free will. God is love. He seeks to love us, not to control us. What does God want from us? Nothing. At least in the sense of us giving Him something of ours that He wants. There is no needful service we can give Him, and He doesn't want us to.

The focus of love is another person. So, although God is love, He does not give us eternal life as a reward for our love. We humans fail all the time but there was one exception. Jesus never sinned, He never lost faith in God, and God the Father had no hesitation in raising Him from the dead. But, given that we can't live sinless lives or offer perfect love, is there something we can do for God that doesn't require perfection? Well, there is one thing. We can believe in Jesus (John 6:29). Being a friend doesn't require being perfect. How many of your friends are perfect? But Jesus maintains His side of the friendship to perfection. He is our mediator with God. We get saved as Jesus' reward for His faithfulness. God the Father raised His Son from death and exalted Him to the highest place. God receives Jesus' friends because Christ died for them and God will not allow His Son's death to be in vain. We can't do anything flawlessly, but we can befriend, or believe in, Jesus. It's the only thing that matters, according to Paul.

Eternal life is ours as soon as we believe in Jesus as our friend. He frees us from slavery to sin. Our selfish desires melt away. Eternal life is not just everlasting life. It is a life of freedom, knowing God, and as Jesus described it, "abundant life".

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13. Paul's Conclusion

Galatians 6:11-18

Now we come to the climax of Paul's letter to the Galatians. Paul, his scribe, and friends in his church didn't know they would be writing God's Word when they wrote the letter. Yes, it was a group effort—see Chapter 1, verse 2. God hadn't inspired additional scriptures for over 300 years. The four gospels hadn't been completed yet. This was the first of Paul's letters. They must have been aware that the spirit of God was with them in writing the letter. Paul wanted to finish with something special, so he writes in his own hand instead of dictating it. Here is what he wrote.

Galatians 6:11

[11] See what large letters I make when I am writing in my own hand!

In the first century, people often used scribes to write their letters. The Mediterranean region was a collectivist society, in contrast to our modern western individualist culture. So, the Galatians were accustomed to receiving letters from multiple people and dictated to a scribe. If there was a lead author, that person might handwrite the close of the letter to prove its genuineness.

Most often I typewrite my letters because my handwriting is illegible, but if I am writing to a friend, I might hand write a "P.S." to add a personal touch to the letter. I wonder if that factored into Paul's conclusion.

The writers of commentaries suggest the reason Paul wrote in large letters was because he had poor eyesight, or for emphasis. One thing we can be sure of, Paul's handwritten post script must be significant. His aim in the letter was to win over any wavering Galatians. Let's see what he wrote.

Galatians 6:12

> [12] It is those who want to make a good showing in the flesh that try to compel you to be circumcised — only that they may not be persecuted for the cross of Christ.

The Holy Spirit revealed to Paul the hearts of those in the circumcision faction. They liked to look good and appear to be religious people. They liked to be seen as serving God. But they feared being persecuted for the cross of Christ. What does that mean? Why was the cross a problem? Paul mentioned the offence of the cross before, in Chapter 5, verse 11.

The false believers came from Jerusalem. No doubt Jewish hardliners were persecuting Christians for saying salvation was through faith in Christ who they crucified, and not by obedience to the laws of Moses. The cross of Christ did not impress the Jewish authorities. Why would you worship someone executed by the authorities? How could such a person

be the Messiah? Surely you must obey God's laws to be approved by God? Persecution tests a Christian's faithfulness. Some commentators have suggested that the word for "persecuted" in verse 12 might imply the Jews were angry at those Jews who became Christians, and responded by ostracising them from Jewish society. But then… next verse:

Galatians 6:13

> [13] Even the circumcised do not themselves obey the law, but they want you to be circumcised so that they may boast about your flesh.

Paul thought the false believers were not really devoted to following the Jewish laws. Their motives were self-centred. They wanted to boast about their own achievements. It would be like Christians boasting of how many people their church has baptised. Christians wouldn't do that, would they? ☺

Good works, themselves, are not the problem, it's why we do them. Legalism is the belief that we can offer some needful service to God. God doesn't want it. God is a giver. He wants to give us abundant life. God wants to give us His Spirit to guide us in this life. Why would we insist on giving something back to God? Verses 12 & 13 imply it is human sin. The legalists want to boast about what they have done.

The motivation behind legalism is fear. People fear persecution from others and punishment by God. The Apostle John told us in 1 John 4:18 that God's perfect love casts out fear. The church is a vehicle for God's love. Our faith is on display when we love one another. Just as the truth sets us free from lies, love sets us free from fear, because we know God loves us, we have nothing to fear from Him. In this, Paul found cause to boast.

Galatians 6:14

> [14] May I never boast of anything except the cross of our Lord Jesus Christ, by which the world has been crucified to me, and I to the world.

For Paul, it was unthinkable to brag about any achievement of his own. Far from denying the cross of Christ as evidence Jesus was not the Messiah, Paul boasts at how the cross displays Christ's faithfulness and love for us. God sets us free because of Christ's sacrifice for us on the cross. Christ acquiesced to humanity's sin of rejecting and crucifying Him. Although He was the very God who created us, who sustains us in every breath we take, despite our rebellion and our failure to love one another, He refused to act in self-defence or retaliation, but allowed His crucifixion to be carried out. He sacrificed Himself for us. The wages, or consequence, of sin is death, and in this case, it was humanity's sin and Christ's death.

Except for Christ, everyone is sinful. We can't avoid sin. As Paul put it, we are slaves to sin. We accept sin in our lives because we think sin is just a part of being human. But Paul wrote, regarding his relationship with the world of sin, he had crucified it, meaning he put the desires of his flesh to death, and followed the Spirit instead. Christians are no longer under condemnation for sin. Paul didn't feel guilty and God didn't regard him as guilty.

Satan tells us otherwise. He says while we are in his world he is the ruler. The devil tries to tempt or coerce us to sin. Jesus tells us in the Bible, Satan is a liar, a cunning liar perhaps, but knowing he is a liar protects us from his lies. And the letter to the Galatians warns us, legalism is a lie. The devil specialises in using half-truths. Although it is true that our sinful nature will be with us as long as we live in the flesh, it is not true that

we must do evil things. Christ has broken the devil's power over us. James 4:7 says, "resist the devil and he will flee from you". The flesh doesn't have it all its own way. The Spirit opposes the desires of the flesh, as Paul wrote in Galatians 5:17.

Galatians 6:15

> [15] For neither circumcision nor uncircumcision is anything; but a new creation is everything!

Paul said that the religious things we do are unimportant. Whether or not you light candles, burn incense, sing certain hymns, or say the right liturgy, makes no difference regarding your relationship with God. The gospel is not ultimately about us anyway. The good news is that God restores His creation. Being a part of God's new creation is good news for Christians, but inexplicably many refuse to believe in Christ for salvation. When Jesus said you must be born again, He was speaking of a new creation. A new spiritual nature is born in us when the Holy Spirit joins with our spirit as a first instalment of life in God's Kingdom.

Lesslie Newbigin in "Truth to Tell" (1991, p. 11) points out that the resurrection of Christ gives us a new understanding of the cosmos. The only analogue for Jesus' resurrection in scripture is the creation story. Just as our world is our starting point to understand creation, the resurrection of Jesus from the dead is the beginning of the new creation. The incarnation and the resurrection of Christ establish the Christian worldview. We can believe it or try to substitute another faith. Either way, we are responsible for our faith and it is by faith we cleave either to Christ or a false god.

The indwelling Holy Spirit frees us from slavery to sin. We saw in Chapter 5, the fruit of the Spirit is love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, generosity, faithfulness, gentleness and

self-control. Note the last one: self-control. Christians are free from Satan's control and slavery to sin. Hence the new creation is everything to us and with that Paul can conclude his letter.

Galatians 6:16

> [16] As for those who will follow this rule — peace be upon them, and mercy, and upon the Israel of God.

Paul blessed with peace and mercy those who conform to this rule. He was not saying that Christians have to follow another law. The rule of God to which Paul referred meant that circumcision and uncircumcision are of no consequence, but our re-creation, our rebirth into God's kingdom, our faith in Christ is everything, it is essential for eternal life.

The benediction in verse 16, "peace be upon them, and mercy, and upon the Israel of God", is a standard prayer Paul learnt in Pharisee School. "Peace be upon Israel" is the Hebrew blessing found in Ps 125:5 and Ps 128:6. Paul is purposely using a Jewish prayer in a Christian context. He did not reject Old Testament teaching, but re-interpreted it in a new way. He understood the phrase, "the Israel of God" to now include the church. It no longer only applied to the Jewish nation. The way Paul used the Old Testament gives us permission to view the Hebrew scriptures from a Christian perspective. After all, the long-awaited Messiah of the Old Testament is "our Lord Jesus Christ" as Paul called Him twice in these closing verses (14 & 18).

The book of Galatians helps us to better understand the Bible. God's Covenant with Abraham is conspicuous throughout the Bible, providing a framework for scripture. God covenanted with us to be our God and for us to be His people. Paul identified this with the gospel spoken beforehand to Abraham, who hadn't heard of Jesus Christ. Just as Abraham believed in God and God regarded him as righteous. Everyone

who has never heard the gospel, but trusts God, He reckons as righteous.

Galatians 6:17-18

> [17] From now on, let no one make trouble for me; for I carry the marks of Jesus branded on my body. [18] May the grace of our Lord Jesus Christ be with your spirit, brothers and sisters. **Amen.**

Unlike the legalists, Paul had suffered for his faith. Only a person of faith would be prepared to suffer persecution rather than deny Christ. The scars on Paul's body came from being stoned and beaten. He associated those scars with the marks of ownership branded on slaves. He belonged to Jesus. Freedom from bondage to sin means freedom to live by the Spirit. This freedom, in a sinful world, may well result in Christians suffering persecution. In the first few centuries after Christ, many Christians were persecuted and martyred, yet the church grew. The denial of Christ is a serious matter because it withholds the gospel from doomed people. Those Christians suffered for us.

We have learnt from Paul's conclusion the startling truth that legalism is motivated by the flesh's fear of persecution because of the cross of Christ. The devil has used legalism to attack the church since the beginning. It is a favourite lie of Satan. The church today can expect this temptation.

Paul closed with a prayer for the Galatians that the grace of our Lord Jesus Christ may be with their spirits.

We leave Paul's letter with two questions.

1. Was Paul's Letter successful?

You will want to know if Paul's letter to the Galatians was successful. Paul and Barnabas planted the Galatian churches when they visited the cities of Antioch (the one in Pisidia), Iconium, Lystra, and Derbe (see map).

From ancient graves found in southern Galatia, Paul was a common name. It seems people were naming their sons after Paul. A certain Bishop Paul from Galatia attended the Council of Chalcedon, the fourth ecumenical council of the Christian church in 451 AD. These cities remained Christian until the Muslim conquests of the 7th and 8th centuries when they were destroyed or supplanted by new cities. So, we can be sure that Paul's letter was well received. He wrote in Romans 15:23 regarding his missionary work that there was "no further place for me in these regions". So, Paul, himself, was satisfied he had completed his work of preaching the gospel and establishing churches.

Above is Antioch today, which was in neighbouring Psidia. Below is Iconium.

Lystra (above) and Derbe (below).

Although these cities no longer survive, Paul's letter to the Galatians continues to speak to the church today. Satan, our arch-enemy, continues to use the same old tactics, which brings me to my second question.

2. How does Galatians speak to the church today?

Just as Paul defended the gospel he proclaimed to the churches of Galatia, the church in every generation has to do the same. Today, we don't have the same problem of Jews telling us we should obey the laws of Moses. For us, the majority of Australians assume they know enough about Christianity to ignore it. For one thing, they think it is about living by rules and regulations, the Ten Commandments. When people call Christians hypocrites, it exposes a misunderstanding of Christianity as obedience to religious laws.

Paul declared the only thing that counts is faith, not works of the law. We contribute nothing to our salvation. It is the average Aussie who is the hypocrite. They try to make out they are fairly good people. As if God, the Creator of the universe, would be impressed by our puny efforts at self-righteousness. You know what Paul would say to them: "I am astonished. You stupid Australians! Strewth, who pulled the wool over your eyes?"

"But", they hit back, "what about your hypocrisy?" My hypocrisy and theirs are diametrically opposed. They think they are just as good as anyone else and God, if He exists, would approve of their efforts. Christians, on the other hand, know they need God and it is Jesus who has saved us. Our failure to conduct sinless lives only underlines our need for a Saviour. My behaviour does not always exhibit the Spirit who lives in me. Recall the picture of the ancient Greek actor's mask. The average non-Christian tries to wear a mask of self-

righteousness. They want to appear good to the world. They want to make a good showing in the flesh, as Paul said.

By contrast, when Christians sin they wear the mask of a non-believer. We just show what sin looks like. When Christians sin, we are like those of the world. No wonder they get so mad. Of course, we shouldn't do that. We should show the world Christ by our behaviour.

The false believers criticised Paul by saying, "you Christians can't have it both ways—Christ saves you so you can do whatever you want." We, too, can expect that objection. But our freedom from trying to win God's approval, from slavery to law obedience, and from trying to look good in the world's eyes, hardly make us lead self-indulgent lives. Freedom is not behind our failures. It is the sinful nature. The indwelling Spirit urges Christians in works of love for others.

Jesus made the love commandment prominent in His preaching. He taught that love is the message of the Scriptures. When Paul said, "For the whole law is summed up in a single commandment, 'You shall love your neighbour as yourself.'" (Galatians 5:14), he was citing Jesus (Matt 22:36-40).

God wants to bless Abraham's spiritual descendants with His Spirit (Gal 3:14). Revivals through history are characterised by the Spirit filling His people. We saw how Paul's letter to the Galatians was influential in revivals. Martin Luther discovered the message of Galatians in ~1500 AD, and the protestant reformation followed. The message of Galatians was influential in the 18th century revival through John and Charles Wesley. William Seymour, the pastor who led the Azusa St Pentecostal revival in the early 1900s, applied Galatians 3:28 to include everyone: black, white, male and female because our divisions disappear when we enter the new creation. We are all one in Christ.

Unbelievers object, it is not fair for God to condemn people who haven't heard the gospel. In Galatians, Paul pointed us to the example of Abraham, who lived 2,000 years before Christ, before God inspired any scriptures, and 430 years before He gave the law to Moses. Abraham was sinful, the same as the rest of humanity, but God reckoned him as righteous because of his faith. Abraham trusted in God even though he did not know God's name, or how God was going to fulfil His promise to him. None of the heroes of the faith in the Old Testament understood how God would save them.

But today, thanks to the Holy Spirit inspiring the early church to give us the New Testament, we have the good news more fully to share in our neighbourhoods, as Paul did in Galatia. God reaches people through Spirit-filled Christians sharing the gospel and the Spirit's power to save and do works of compassion for those in need. Today Christians still walk by the spirit.

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14. Winds of Revival

I recently bought a book with a recommendation written on the back cover saying the final chapter was worth the price of the book, so I just read the last chapter. My previous chapter was where my sermon series ended. This extra chapter is free, as is the rest of the book ("Freely you have received; freely give" Matt 10:8). Consequently, I can say this chapter is worth the price of the book! ☺

In the first chapter, we saw Galatians had been associated with revivals. There was another revival, one that I didn't mention. The revival that resulted in Paul writing his letter. Jesus, before He departed for heaven, told His disciples to wait for the Holy Spirit to come. At the Jewish festival of Pentecost, the eleven gathered in the upper room where Jesus had hosted His last supper (Acts 1:13).

Acts 2:1-4

> [1] When the day of Pentecost had come, they were all together in one place. [2] And suddenly from heaven there

> came a sound like the rush of a violent wind, and it filled the entire house where they were sitting. [3] Divided tongues, as of fire, appeared among them, and a tongue rested on each of them. [4] All of them were filled with the Holy Spirit and began to speak in other languages, as the Spirit gave them ability.

The Holy Spirit made His presence known by the coming of a howling wind, flames of fire, and the gift of speaking in other languages. Then Peter, filled with the Spirit, proclaimed the gospel and God added 3,000 people to the church, in the church's first taste of revival (Acts 2:41).

Because of Christians fleeing persecution in Jerusalem, the revival spread to Antioch. The disciples in Jerusalem sent Barnabas to help plant a church. Because of the large numbers of people coming to the Lord, Barnabas went to Tarsus to find Paul and bring him to Antioch (Acts 11:19-26). The outpouring of the Spirit continued as Paul and Barnabas took the gospel on their first missionary trip to Galatia. Paul mentioned the miracles that the Galatians witnessed in Gal 3:5. Perhaps the Galatians' experience of revival was why Paul was astonished that they could so soon believe they needed to do something more to justify themselves before God.

The outward manifestations of the Spirit at later revivals were similar, with displays of power to heal, deliver and save. You might suspect God would want this constantly, but revivals are sporadic events. Some surmise that outpourings of the Spirit only occur at God's discretion. They might infer this from a comment by Jesus.

John 3:8

> "… The wind blows where it chooses, and you hear the sound of it, but you do not know where it comes from or

where it goes. So it is with everyone who is born of the Spirit."

We may well wonder, what can the church do to help bring revival? We aren't making much progress by ourselves. Although we don't know where the wind will blow, we can ask the Spirit. He knows everything there is to know. Revival enthusiasts have observed that prayer precedes revival. The Bible gives an example of prayer for revival.

Psalm 85:6-7

6 Will you not revive us again,
so that your people may rejoice in you?
7 Show us your steadfast love, O LORD,
and grant us your salvation.

No doubt the disciples who gathered in the upper room at Pentecost prayed for the promised Spirit to come. Although Jesus had told His disciples to wait for the coming of the Spirit, they still had to be faithful and obedient. The Holy Spirit does not come where He is unwelcome. Too many church people are content to live without the Spirit. We cannot expect revival where the powerful presence of the Spirit is not desired.

Of course, God wants revival, we don't have to beg Him for it. God's children align with the Spirit's desires when they yearn for revival. Everyone with a heart after God wants to see others saved. Although revivals are all too infrequent, we should not suspect that God is withholding revival or salvation from anyone. "The problem is down there," God said to John Wimber regarding the paucity of healing miracles in church.

Things like prayer, church unity, Christian fellowship and inspired teaching all flow from hearts filled with the Spirit. The devil twists the order of these things so that the gift of the law becomes the dirge of legalism. Such false teaching is the way

of the kingdom of darkness, designed to elicit failure and to neutralise the effectiveness of the church.

Many unbelievers think Christianity demands obedience to the Ten Commandments. But Paul made it clear that Christians are not subject to the law (Gal 5:18). Even the law of love—do unto others as you would have them do unto you, by itself, is not a sure guide because of our sin. As Paul said, we need to be guided by the Spirit (Gal 5:25). Living by the Holy Spirit is the way of life in the kingdom of God. The church needs to move beyond acceptance of doctrines to faith in Christ, receiving the Spirit and walking as the Spirit leads.

Come Holy Spirit

Paul's letter to the Galatians shows Paul's response to the total devotion of Christ. He refused to believe we could add anything extra to what Christ has already done. But in our post-modern culture, many people regard having doubts a good thing. So, instead of warning people of false beliefs, they

encourage everyone to have their own beliefs. Truth, to many today, is relative. They view certainty as arrogance. But how can conflicting beliefs all be true? Surely, only one religion can be true. Paul, after his conversion, believed in Jesus as the Messiah, the Son of God. The slightest deviation from the Christian gospel rung alarm bells for him. The centre of Paul's faith was a person, Jesus Christ, not a doctrine, even the doctrine of justification by faith, which is sometimes understood in purely intellectual terms. Paul committed his life to Christ so much that he considered his pre-Christian life as dead and buried. Jesus had given Paul a new Spirit. This happens in revival. Jesus Christ imparts the Spirit or, to those who already have the Spirit, a greater measure of His anointing, so the church can proclaim the gospel in the power of His name.

The wind of the Spirit inspired the writing of Galatians in the first century. Through his letter, Paul drew attention to Christ and the centrality of faith in Him. Christ dominated Paul's thought. He mentioned Christ 39 times in the brief letter to the Galatians. Paul saw his call to the ministry as coming from Christ (Gal 1:1). We are justified before God by our faith in Christ (Gal 2:16). When Paul said to walk by the Spirit, he was referring to the Spirit of Christ (Gal 4:6). The way Christ wants his church, and each of us, to live is by following His Spirit. Disunity in the church is symptomatic that we are not walking by the Spirit.

Prayer for revival is fine, but we do not presume to tell God what to do. We need to be aware of our place with God. We are friends of His Son. The background to the struggle for revival is the spiritual warfare between the Kingdom of God and the Kingdom of darkness. The background to the struggle for revival is the spiritual warfare between the Kingdom of God and the Kingdom of darkness. God's will is not always done on

earth as it is in heaven. When we pray for revival, we are engaging in spiritual warfare.

The Galatians accepted false teaching because they were not following the Spirit. He protects us from falling. Christians need to hear His voice, the inner promptings, the words of knowledge, and acts of compassion for others using the gifts of the Spirit. In so doing, we take the humble path of obedience to the indwelling Spirit. It wasn't just prayer that moved God to send revival's in the past; it was people who gave themselves completely to their God and were used by God to make a difference. The church has a responsibility in this.

But let us not blame the church when revival tarries. The revival Christians seek must start with ourselves. It is contagious, but it must start with at least one person completely sold out to God, united with Him in faith. Then others in the church catch the vision and desire revival. By ourselves, we can't revive anyone. But as joy-filled, saved people who can't keep it to themselves, we share the gospel. The Holy Spirit renews the church, and having been revived ourselves, we pray for revival in others and share our faith with everyone who will listen. When Spirit-filled Christians meet together to worship God, the anointing flows, angels turn up, miracles happen, and Jesus is glorified. As we saw for Paul, the commitment is costly. We have to die to self. If we want revival, we must first seek it in ourselves. No half-measures will do. We need undivided hearts, as the psalmist said. Let us walk by the Spirit and glorify the name of Jesus.

Psalm 86:10-12

[10] For you are great and do wondrous things;
you alone are God.
[11] Teach me your way, O LORD,
that I may walk in your truth;
give me an undivided heart to revere your name.

[12] I give thanks to you, O Lord my God,
with my whole heart,
and I will glorify your name forever.

The End

About the Author

Derek Philip Thompson was born in Hammersmith, England in 1950 and in 1957 his family immigrated to Australia. He grew up and went to school in Penrith, NSW. After studying electrical engineering at Sydney University, he worked for 34 years with NSW Public Works as an electrical engineer and project manager. It was in 1974 that he became a Christian and married Margaret. They have two daughters. After taking early retirement in 2009, Derek completed a Diploma in Theology at Charles Sturt University. Since 2005 Derek has been the involved in a regional ecumenical church organisation called *Five Islands Christian Ministries*.

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